

# OSEPH WILMOT

OR

## The Memoirs of a Man-Servant

BY

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS

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NEW EDITION, PART I

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# JOSEPH WILMOT

OR

## The Memoirs of A Man-Servant

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### PART THE FIRST

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE SCHOOL.

WAS fifteen years of age when the schoolmaster, at whose establishment I had been brought from my earliest infancy, was seized with apoplexy and died in few hours. Beyond this seminary—which was situated in the neighbourhood of Leicester—I had no associations. I never remembered to have been elsewhere: no happy home received me when the half-yearly holidays came round. I never had experienced any parental care: I was told that my father and mother had both perished of some epidemic malady when I was a be in my cradle. I had no relatives nor friends—at least not to my knowledge: for none ever came to see me. I was not aware how it had happened that I was placed at this school, nor who paid for my maintenance there. All my experiences were those of friendless orphan; and I was then ignorant for what profession, trade, or calling I might have been destined—what views might have been entertained concerning me—and whether there were persons in the world sufficiently interested in me to have any such views at all.

Mr. Nelson's academy was what might be termed a second-rate one,—the boys for the most part consisting of tradesmen's sons; and thus the education we received was far more of a commercial than of a classical nature. The scholars in the higher classes, however, learnt Latin;—while such accomplishments as drawing and dancing were considered as *extras*, to be paid additionally for, —and for which no provision was made on my account. It was a cheap school, the terms averaging from thirty to thirty-five pounds a year. There were altogether about twenty boarders, and double that number of day-scholars. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, who kept this seminary, had no children of their own: they were elderly people,—practising a great deal of meanness under the name of economy, and stinting their pupils very much in respect to fare with the pretence of the most sedulous regard for their health. At the same time there was no positive cruelty in their treatment towards us; and during the holidays, when I was the only scholar who, having no home to go to, remained at the academy, I occasionally experienced some little indulgences. For these I was indebted rather to Mr. Nelson than to his wife, he being the kinder of the

two. But even if I had been surrounded with all possible comforts, and had found myself the object of the most affectionate attentions,—these could not have compensated for the want of that happy variety and the absence of those cheering influences which are only to be found in the love of parents and in periodical visits to home. My life at school was therefore a monotonous and an unhappy one; and if I were not naturally of a somewhat gay disposition, I should have pined and sickened with sorrow at such a mode of existence. Even as it was, my heart used to be riven with the sorest pangs when "breaking-up day" arrived—when the joyous voices of my school fellows combined in the thrilling chorus of the holiday songs—when the boxes were packed up, all save *mine*—and when I heard them gleefully telling each other how they should amuse themselves, and what diversions would be certain to await them at the parental dwellings to which they were about to repair. And then, too, when they were all gone and I was left alone in the spacious school-room, how my young heart swelled almost to bursting!—what suffocating sobs rose up in my throat! what bitter scalding tears rained down my cheeks! Some of the boys were wont to promise that they would ask their fathers and mothers to invite "Pretty Joe"—for that was the name by which I was familiarly called—to pass a few days at their house; and at first I was comforted by this prospect of going even amongst strangers: but doubtless the fathers and mothers thought it was quite sufficient to have their own children to keep, to amuse, and to divert, without caring about a stranger-child,—for the invitations never arrived; so that at last, when breaking-up days

came round again, and those promises on the part of my young companions were renewed with well-meaning emphasis and genuine sincerity, I only acknowledged them with a sad and sickly smile: for I knew that they would not be fulfilled.

I was called Pretty Joe because I was considered to be the best looking boy in the school. I was not tall for my age—and was slightly built: but I believe I may say without vanity, that I had a very genteel appearance and was symmetrically shaped. I can well remember what I was at fifteen—a profusion of dark hair clustered in natural curls about my head and was parted over a high forehead: my dark eyes had an expression of softness, without being absolutely melancholy: my features were delicate, and even feminine regularity. The boys used to say what nice teeth I had; and for personal cleanliness Joseph Wilmot was invariably quoted by Mrs. Nelson as an example. I was considered to be intelligent and quick; and as I generally mastered my lessons more readily than most of the schoolfellows, I never hesitated to assist them in their tasks. Naturally good-natured and obliging, I was an almost universal favourite; and I do not remember that I was ever bullied or ill-treated by those who were older and bigger than myself.

But I need not dwell at unnecessary length upon that portion of my existence which was passed at school. It was, as I have already said, when I had completed my fifteenth year, that Mr. Nelson was suddenly carried off by a fit of pleurisy. This event occurred in the middle of the holidays,—therefore when all the school were away at home. Even before the funeral took place,

overheard the servants saying amongst themselves that Mrs. Nelson did not intend to carry on the school; and then for the first time I began to wonder for what walk of life I was destined. What was to be done with me? Was I to continue under the care of Mrs. Nelson? or should I at last be informed whether I had any friends in the world to take charge of me? I began to experience considerable uneasiness upon these points: for I possessed an intelligence somewhat beyond my years,—but which was nevertheless, in another sense, hampered and confined by the monotonous existence I had led, and by the limitation of my ideas to the narrow walls of that seminary.

The funeral took place—circulars were despatched to the parents of all the boys, intimating that Mrs. Nelson declined carrying on the seminary—and a board was set up in the front garden announcing the premises to be let. The servants received a month's warning to quit; and an upholsterer was sent for to take the furniture on a valuation. Three weeks thus passed after the funeral: and still not a word was dropped to me by Mrs. Nelson in respect to my own fate. Every day I determined to question her—but I dared not: she evidently felt the loss of her husband deeply—though none of her sympathy was bestowed upon me; for if I ventured to accost her, she begged me to go and play and not worry her. Play indeed! I had no one to play with; and even if had hosts of companions, I felt no inclination for any such diversion,—being full of anxiety, suspense, and uncertainty in respect to my own lot. Indeed, notwithstanding that my spirits were naturally good, they came not to my succour now: I grew depressed and desponding—and was per-

haps more unhappy than I ever yet had been. Methought that the servant looked compassionately upon me; and this circumstance, so far from cheering me, served to deepen the gloom which was settling itself upon my mind: for there seemed something ominous and foreboding in that demonstration of sympathy from quarters where I had never experienced it before.

At length—one morning, nearly a month after the funeral—as I was seated moping in the schoolroom, which never had appeared so cold and comfortless before, although it was in the middle of summer,—I was sent for into the parlour. There I found Mrs. Nelson, in her widow's weeds, in serious conversation with a stout elderly man, whom I knew to be the grocer that had supplied the school ever since I could remember. He had a harsh and even stern expression of countenance; and as my presence in the parlour at once interrupted the discourse which had been going on, he turned and contemplated me attentively. Mrs. Nelson appeared to watch with some degree of interest the result of this survey, which ended by the grocer giving an ominous and solemn shake of the head.

"You don't think he will suit, Mr. Jukes?" said the widow, in a low mysterious voice, but nevertheless perfectly audible to me, as I stood with my cap in my hand in the middle of the room: for I was not asked to sit down, and I did not dare do so of my own accord.

"He is too slight and delicate for my business, ma'am," replied the grocer. "You know, as I have already told you, I don't want an extra hand at all at this present moment: but if I could have obliged one who has been a good customer to me—particularly

under present circumstances"—and he glanced at the mourning garments which the widow wore,—“I should have been glad to take him. But he couldn’t carry a heavy basket about; and he’s of no use unless he could. Besides, ma’am, he’s too genteel for the grocery and cheesemongering line: we want strong boys—not slender and pretty ones.”

I felt that I had become pale as death while Mr. Jukes was thus speaking; my heart sank within me—a cold tremor came over me—I literally shivered: for the truth of my position was now revealed in all its utter dreariness. I had indeed no friends!—not a being in the world appeared to be interested in me—no, not even the school-mistress herself, by whom I had been brought up: for she was evidently making the attempt to get rid of me by thrusting me into the service of one who did not want my assistance. She threw a quick sidelong glance towards me. At that moment the tears were trickling down my cheeks; and being slightly touched by emotions, she said, “You can sit down, Joseph.”

“Don’t you think, ma’am,” asked Mr. Jukes, “that he had better leave the parlour for a few minutes while we talk the matter over?”

“Yes, to be sure—it would be better,” answered the widow: then, turning to me, she added, “Go back to the schoolroom for a little while, Joseph—but keep in the way, as you may perhaps be wanted again presently.”

I accordingly issued from the parlour, closing the door behind me: but the moment I stood in the passage outside, I was seized with an irresistible curiosity—indeed, an intense anxiety—to learn the nature of the discussion about to take place between those two persons who had suddenly

revealed themselves in the light of the arbiters of my destiny. I therefore applied my ear to the key-hole; and, with suspended breath, lost not a syllable of the conversation which immediately followed my departure from the room.

“But if you cannot take him, Mr. Jukes,” asked the widow, “what on earth am I to do with him? It’s impossible for me to keep the poor boy. Mr. Nelson has left me with means comparatively limited; and, as you know, I am going to reside with my maiden-sister at Liverpool. I must set off to-morrow—all my arrangements are made—and she will expect me at a given hour. Something *must* be done with Joseph before I leave.”

“But why, ma’am,” asked the grocer, “did you push it off to the last moment?”

“Why, you see,” rejoined the widow, “I waited the result of those advertisements that I had put into the London papers, calling upon Joseph’s unknown friend or relative, or whatever he is, to come forward. But there has been no answer; as I have already told you, two half-years have now elapsed without the usual remittance. So I suppose the person who used to make it is either dead, or else wilfully intended to throw the boy on the hands, of poor dear Mr. Nelson and myself.”

“But have you no clue, ma’am?” inquired Mr. Jukes: “have you no means of fathoming this mystery?”

“Not the slightest,” responded the widow. “I have already explained to you that the half-yearly payments used to be made through the London agent of the Leicester bank: no name was ever given—and from the very first moment that Joseph, when only a year old, was entrusted to

our charge, no inquiry has ever been made concerning him."

"Then the payments themselves," observed Mr. Jukes inquiringly, "must have been effected in ignorance of whether the boy was alive or dead?"

"Not exactly so," answered Mrs. Nelson: "for it was an understood thing from the very outset, that the London agent of the Leicester bank should only continue to receive the half-yearly amounts so long as no intimation was given that farther payments were rendered unnecessary by the boy's death."

"And do you not remember, ma'am," asked the grocer, "sufficient of the personal appearance of the female who entrusted the child to your care, to be enabled to take some measures to trace her out?"

"I never saw her face," responded Mrs. Nelson: "our interview did not last many minutes—and she was veiled the whole time she was here. The fact is, poor Mr. Nelson and myself would not have taken the child under such mysterious circumstances—only that we were pressed for money at the time. A hundred guineas were offered as a sort of premium, or earnest of good faith in the matter; and we naturally reasoned that those who were interested in the child, would not display such liberality if they harboured the intention of ultimately throwing him entirely upon our hands."

"And do you think, ma'am, that it was the mother herself who brought you the child?"

"Certainly not. She was a lady—or at all events a superior kind of person: but that she was *not* the parent, I am well convinced, as she exhibited no kind of emotion, on leaving the infant with me. And a mother, you know, Mr. Jukes, could not have behaved thus callously."

"One would think not," remarked the grocer: "but who knows?"

"Well, it's of no use," resumed Mrs. Nelson, "to discuss the past: it is the present which demands my attention. Of course I cannot maintain the boy: it is quite sufficient to lose a year's keep for him—for it is not only his food, but his clothes and pocket-money that I am thus robbed of. I repeat, therefore, something must be done with him to-day. The servants will all leave to-morrow morning—the house will be shut up—the keys will be given to the landlord—and I am to be off by an early coach. Surely, Mr. Jukes, you could manage to place the boy in some respectable situation? There's Thompson the linendraper, for instance: he has had a great deal of thy money—"

"Useless, ma'am to think of it!" ejaculated Jukes. "It was but last Monday I asked Thompson to take a nephew of mine—just such another boy as this Wilmot in personal appearance: but he refused. Trade is getting bad; and shopkeepers, instead of taking fresh hands, are discharging old ones. For my part I don't know what you are to do with the boy: unless—"

At this moment I heard one of the servants descending the stairs; and I was compelled to make a precipitate retreat into the school-room, for fear of being caught in the unworthy position of a listener. When there, I sat down at one of the desks—buried my face in my hands—and cried bitterly. Oh! how cold went the iron of my neglected condition into my very soul: but every syllable of the conversation I had just overheard was seared as it were with *another* iron that was red-hot upon my brain;—and there it burnt as if eating its way in, accompanied with ex-

cruciating tortures. For a moment I thought of flying back to the parlour—falling on my knees at Mrs. Nelson's feet—and beseeching her not to turn me adrift upon a world of which I was ignorant, but the bitter bleakness of which I already more than half suspected. Yet, on maturer reflection I dared not take the step: I saw that it would be tantamount to a confession that I had played the part of an eavesdropper—that I had listened at the door. Good heavens! what would become of me? My young heart wept tears of blood. I was too inexperienced to conjecture for an instant what motive there could have been for my parents to have abandoned me: and I asked myself why they had done so? Some secret voice, speaking within me, appeared to say that I had been cheated with the tale of their death; and perhaps it was a consolation to which I clung, to reflect that they might after all be still alive, and that sooner or later I should know them and be acknowledged by them.

At the expiration of a few minutes after I had thus sought the school-room, one of the maid-servants came to tell me that I was to return to the parlour: and she added—methought with a look of deep commiseration—“You are going away presently, Joseph. I have orders to pack up your box.”

“But where am I going?” I asked eagerly.

“I do not know,” she replied. “Mr. Jukes, I think, is going to take you somewhere—most likely,” she added, after a pause and with a still more significant glance of sympathy, “to his own house.”

I hurried to the parlour, composing my features as well as I could, so as not to betray that by listening at the door I had come

to a knowledge of facts so strange and new, and at the same time so replete with a mournful interest for myself. Mrs. Nelson and Mr. Jukes were seated with that air of silent seriousness which people always adopt when they have made up their minds to a particular course, and have to announce it to the individual whom it concerns. As for myself, I experienced a sensation of mingled awe and fright: for young though I was, I knew but too well, and felt but too keenly, that this was an important era in my life, and that perhaps all my future destiny might hinge upon the circumstances of the present moment.

“Sit down, Joseph,” said Mrs. Nelson: “I have something particular to communicate. I am sorry to say, my poor boy, that you have no friends in the world; and I am compelled to cease to be one towards you. I wish it was otherwise—I really do—but we cannot alter the course of events. You are going to leave me, Joseph—I daresay you have already suspected as much, from what was just now remarked in your presence. Mr. Jukes will take you somewhere—But he will explain, Joseph: it is not necessary for me to say any more. So come and wish me good-bye; and here is something to put in your pocket.”

The tears were running down my cheeks; for Mrs. Nelson's words had terribly confirmed—if indeed any such confirmation were wanting—the previous idea which I had already conceived of my utter friendlessness. It struck me that she herself was moved, as much as so selfish, mean, and mercenary a woman could possibly be affected; and as she shook me by the hand, she left half-a-crown it.

“Now, my boy,” said Mr. Jukes, rising from his seat, “We will be

off. I suppose your box is all ready; and I have got my chaise-cart at the door."

"Good-bye, Joseph," again said Mrs. Nelson. "Be a good boy: and—"

"Oh, ma'am!" I exclaimed, feeling as if my heart were ready to burst: for now that I was about to part from her, it seemed as if she suddenly stood in the light of a friend—the only friend, too, that I had in the world; and it was natural that I should thus regard her in that moment of my ineffable anguish; for with her I had been brought up from my infancy:—"Oh, ma'am! pray do not send me away from you—pray don't! I will do anything I can to help to earn my own living: but pray let me go with you—or let me come after you! I will walk, to save expense, and if you will tell me the road—But don't send me away—pray, pray don't!"

"My poor boy," answered Mrs. Nelson—and I think she put her handkerchief to her eyes: indeed, I should be sorry for the credit of humanity in general, and of her own sex in particular, if I were mistaken: "it cannot be! I am too poor to maintain you. Good bye:"—and turning abruptly away, she passed hurriedly into the back parlour, closing the door behind her.

I was about to precipitate myself after her,—when Mr. Jukes caught me by the arm, saying gruffly, "Come now—it's no use your making all this bother: you must go."

His manner frightened me; and the dismay which I experienced suddenly stopped my weeping, and stupefied me as it were into an unnatural calmness. Still holding me by the arm, he led me out of the house, and helped me to ascend into his chaise-cart, which was standing at the front garden gate. The housemaid

brought out my box; and shaking me by the hand, she said, "Good bye, Joseph:"—then, as she turned abruptly away, I heard her murmur, "Poor boy!"—and I saw that she applied the corner of her apron to her eyes.

Mr. Jukes, having also mounted the cart, drove off; and I longed to ask him whither he was going to take me: for I felt assured that the *somewhere* alluded to by Mrs. Nelson did not refer to his own house. But I dared not put the question: he looked so harsh and stern—while his compressed lips gave him an appearance as if he were in a measure angry with me for something, but for what I could not conjecture. The school was situated nearly three quarters of a mile out of the city; and during the drive my reflections were as painful as they were varied. A horrible uncertainty filled my soul; and then I thought that at the very moment when I was thus being turned adrift from the only place that I had ever known as a home, all my late school companions were happy and comfortable at *their* homes, with affectionate parents and amidst kind friends. Oh, how hard was my lot!—worse than a known and positive orphanage: for if my parents were alive I was discarded by them—abandoned—cast off!

The vehicle entered the city, and presently halted in front of a large gloomy-looking building, the immediate contemplation of which filled me with some vague and undefined feeling of dread. Mr. Jukes, leaping out of the cart, rang the bell; and a wicket-gate was opened by a very old man with a most repulsive countenance, but who touched his hat respectfully to the grocer.

"Now, Joseph—this is the place," said the latter individual;

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"look alive and jump down—for I am rather in a hurry."

"But what place is this, sir?" I asked, with a strong shuddering recoil from the entrance of the gloomy building as I alighted from the cart.

"What place is it?" repeated Mr. Jukes: then drawing me a little on one side, he said, "You see, my boy, you have got no friends to take of you; and I am one of the guardians of all poor people who are in such a condition as yourself, or in a like one. You will be well taken care of here, and in a short time apprenticed to a trade—so that you will be able to come out of the establishment altogether in a year or two, and do something to earn your own living."

"But what place is it, sir?" I demanded, with the energy and firmness of desperation.

"What place is it?" he again repeated, and now more gruffly than before. "Why, what the deuce place should it be but the Workhouse?"

This name—this horrible name—was associated in my mind with everything degrading,—wretched, cruel, and hopeless, I almost shrieked out as it smote my ear, and as the cause of the maid-servant's sympathy at the school flashed to my mind. She, poor creature, evidently knew or else suspected that I was to be taken to the workhouse:—if she had not been told so, she doubtless conjectured it from the circumstance of Mr. Jukes being a guardian of the poor. I fell down upon my knees and besought him not to compel me to enter that dreadful place. He gave vent to an oath—seized me again by the arm—forced me to rise—and began to drag me towards the wicket-gate at which stood the porter with the repulsive countenance. I felt as if I were being borne to

a place of execution, or to be immured in a living tomb. Again did the energy of despair seize upon me: I burst away from Mr. Jukes—sped along with the fleetness of an arrow shot from a bow—yes I fled as if it were for life or death; and turning round a corner was in a few moments out of his sight. I looked back: he either was not pursuing me, or else I had so far distanced him that he had not as yet reached the corner; and I continued to dash along as if bloodhounds were on my track. On, on I went: several people whom I passed stood still in amazement: with two or three I came in violent collision;—still I put forth all my speed, and at length gained the open country. But I ran on until, thoroughly exhausted, I sank down upon the green sward under a hedge.

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## CHAPTER II.

### LONDON.

I DID not remain longer in that shady retreat than was absolutely necessary for the recovery of my breath: but when I resumed my flight, it was at a less precipitate pace. I reached a main road, and pursued it without any settled purpose in view—without even knowing in which direction it led. Presently I beheld a milestone, which indicated that the distance was ninety-eight miles to London. London!—that word suddenly became full of a magical interest for me. Was it not in London that such scope was offered for the enterprising and persevering spirit? was it not thither that friendless outcasts like myself had bent their way to find the streets paved with gold, and to bask in the sunlight

of Fortune's smiles? Where could I hope to succeed, if not in London? where could I expect to earn my bread, if not in the metropolis? Besides, as Robinson Crusoe was haunted by images of cannibal Indians at every turn on his lonely isle, so was I haunted by the image of Mr. Jukes; and the idea of being overtaken and conveyed to that dreadful work-house made me long to place as great a distance as possible between myself and the city of Leicester. In my inexperience I knew not how much trouble Mr. Jukes might give himself to find me; and I thought he would take a great deal more pains than it was at all probable he did. In London, therefore did I hope to be safe from his pursuit: for I had a sufficient idea of the vastness of the capital to know that one miserable item of the immense mass of humanity might shroud himself there from the knowledge of his pursuers. So my resolve was taken: and to London would I proceed!

Somewhat cheered by the prospect of shortly beholding that mighty city which was associated in my mind with all possible attributes of splendour, wealth, encouragement, and hope, I pursued my way,—accomplishing three or four miles without feeling much weariness, and experiencing a proportionate elevation of the spirits, the greater the distance that grew between me and Leicester. And yet my position was one which had little or nothing satisfactory in it, if properly contemplated. My box was of course left behind in the cart: I had nothing but what I stood upright in—not a single change of linen; and only half-a-crown in my pocket—that half-crown which Mrs. Nelson had given me at parting. It was my everyday suit that I wore; and it was shabby

enough: for my best clothes were in my box—and my *exit* from the school had been too hurried, as the reader has seen, to allow me to change my garments. But for the first few miles these circumstances did not trouble me. When wearied, I entered a field and threw myself on the grass to rest. Sleep came upon me; and when I awoke, I found that I had slumbered for many hours, as the sun was now tinging the western horizon with hues of purple, and orange, and gold.

I rose up: my limbs felt stiff—and there was a certain despondency in my soul; for the night was coming—I knew not how to obtain a bed—and I feared to roam in the dark. All the terrible tales of robbery and murder which I had ever heard or read, crowded into my mind; and it did not occur to me that people were only murdered when they offered a resistance which a boy like myself would be incapable of showing, and when it was believed that they had about their persons something worth the perpetration of such a crime. I continued my way: the evening closed in—the twilight gradually disappeared—the dusk deepened around me. I kept in the middle of the road, so as to guard against a surprise in case anybody should leap out from the hedge upon me. Presently I heard the clatter of wheels and horses' feet coming from behind. I stood aside—a post-chaise-and-four was shooting past me, when I thought that I might have a ride for nothing, and moreover that there would be protection and safeguard on the part of the postillions riding the horses and the people seated within the vehicle. I accordingly sprang up behind; and in this manner proceeded about six miles, until the chaise halted at a town to change horses. Then I

got down—walked rapidly onward—and had just cleared the buildings of the place, when the chaise overtook me again. I resumed my seat behind; and in this way—adopting a similar course at the next halting-place—I managed to ride altogether twenty miles; so that I was now twenty five from Leicester and seventy-four from London. But the chaise went no farther: and I walked on, vainly expecting that it would overtake me once more. I continued my course deep into the night, until thoroughly exhausted; and then entering a field, slept beneath a haystack. When morning came, I washed myself as well as I could in a rivulet; and proceeding to the nearest village, purchased a penny roll, which I eat ravenously. I longed for better fare—but was determined to husband my resources.

I will not go on recording every minute detail of my journey to London. Suffice it to say that by dint of walking until the soles of my shoes were worn through—by getting an occasional ride behind a carriage, or a lift in some good-natured person's cart—after sleeping by night in the fields—and all the time eking out my slender pecuniary means as well as I was able,—I came in sight of the great metropolis at about seven o'clock on the fourth morning after my flight from Leicester. Though well-nigh beaten with fatigues which I was scarcely strong enough to endure, I nevertheless felt my spirits elate with hope as I walked on; and at length began to enter the outskirts of London. I almost fancied that I should at once be accosted by some benevolent person who, inquiring into my circumstances, would offer me a situation by which I could earn my bread: but gradually as I

drew farther and farther towards the heart of the metropolis, the thought crept into my mind that everybody appeared too much intent upon the hurry and bustle of his own affairs, to give any attention to those of a stranger. I felt sadly wearied, and excessively hungry. Presently I saw by the prices marked up in a humble coffee-house window that I could have a good breakfast for fourpence. I examined the state of my finances, and found that I had exactly tenpence remaining: so I entered—and being served with some tea and bread-and-butter, made a hearty meal. When I had done, I thought that I would inquire of the people of the house if they knew where I could procure a situation of some kind: I did not care what, so long as I could earn my bread. But then I reflected that as my clothes were in sad disorder through sleeping in the fields and my long fatiguing travels, it would be necessary to make such improvement as I could in my personal appearance before seeking for employment. It was some time ere I could muster up courage or induce myself to inquire if I could be allowed to use of a chamber to wash myself in: and when I did, I was eyed suspiciously: but after some little demur, it was intimated that on the payment of sixpence my wish should be complied with. This was all I had left: but feeling confident of succeeding in my aim ere nightfall, and having the whole day before me for the search,—considering too how necessary it was to make myself as decent as I possibly could,—I paid the fee, receiving the accommodation I required. By means of soap and water, a clothes-brush, and a hair-comb, I did effect a considerable change in my looks; and as no one could

see how the soles of my shoes were worn through, I felt comfortable and full of cheerfulness. Before, however, I descended from the room to which I had been shown, the landlady of the place instituted the most searching scrutiny, even to the very sheets of the bed; and I felt much shocked as the idea flashed to my mind that she fancied I might have stolen something. Indeed, I made some remark upon the subject,—when she coolly and frankly declared there were so many young thieves about, who came in such specious guises and with all possible pretexts, that it was necessary to take this precaution. Having thus got her into conversation, I told her that I had come up from the country to seek my fortune in London—at which she smiled; and when I asked her if she could recommend me to a place of some kind or another, she laughed outright. Abashed, and suddenly dispirited, I said no more—but quitted the house.

Plunging still deeper into the maze of London—and after looking wistfully into many shops with the idea of entering and renewing my inquiries for employment—I at length mustered up courage to walk into a chemist's; for the man whom I saw behind the counter had something benevolent in his look. I however experienced a refusal far more abrupt than I had anticipated from an individual of his appearance: and continuing my way, called and repeated the same inquiry at several other shops. Everywhere I met a negative response,—sometimes delivered civilly enough—at others with more or less curtness—in one or two instances characterized by downright brutality. My hopes subsided: my apprehensions increased. There was I, a friendless and a pendi-

less wanderer in the streets of the metropolis: hunger was gaining upon me: and then came the thought of where I was to lay my head throughout the night that was approaching,—for there were no fields at hand, wherein to stretch my weary limbs beneath a haystack! It is true, I had not literally believed, as Dick Whittington did, that the streets were paved with gold: but I had certainly fancied that London presented such numerous opportunities for willing industry to push its way, that not more than a few hours would elapse ere I should find myself in a position to earn my bread. But there I was,—stupified and bewildered by the din and bustle going on around me—stunned by the incessant din sustained by countless vehicles of all kinds, from the splendid equipage dashing past, to the cumbersome wain laden with merchandize, and with its team toiling laboriously along—in the midst too of the busiest population that any city under the sun possesses—men, women, and children hurrying hither and thither, and all seeming intent upon affairs of vital import—there was I, as completely alone in the heart of all this noise and turmoil as if I had been standing on the summit of a barren rock in the middle of a vast ocean whose heaving billows and careering waves were flowing, and tossing and surging up around!

Never shall I forget any one incident, thought, or feeling which I experienced on this memorable day,—the first day of my acquaintance with London! It is a date indelibly fixed upon my memory,—to which all that has yet been narrated served but as mere prefatory matter and which may therefore be deemed the starting point of my history. It was the 28th of July, 1836. But let me

continue. I wandered on and on—I rambled hither and thither—I roamed through square and street, lane and alley—I crossed bridges: in that one day I saw more of what may be termed the exterior aspect of London, than many of its inhabitants usually behold in a month. Evening came; and the shops began to blaze with gas, while the lamps were lighted in the streets. I was famished with hunger, and half dead with fatigue. I knew not what to do. I would have digged if anybody had given me the work to perform: but to beg I was ashamed. And yet this latter alternative appeared my only resource!

The thousand clocks of the mighty metropolis were proclaiming the hour of ten, as I seated myself—or rather fell down upon the steps of a door in a somewhat obscure street, and where the houses were of a mean description compared with those of the thoroughfares immediately contiguous. Not many persons were passing that way; and those who were took notice of me. I had already seen enough of London to be aware that the spectacle of poverty, rags, and distress must be too familiar to the view of its inhabitants to arrest much attention; and as I now began to reflect on the swarms of medicants I had seen about the streets during this memorable day, I was lamentably disabused of my magnificent ideas of the universal property, as well as of the general scope for the exercise of honest industry, which I had believed to exist in the metropolis.

While I was still seated on that doorstep,—and with difficulty keeping down the tears that gushed up to the very brims of my eyes, as if they came from the fountains of the heart,—I observed that I had become the

object of attention on the part of an individual whose appearance, as seen by an adjacent lamp, would under any other circumstances have made a ludicrous impression on me: but I was now too thoroughly wretched to experience such an effect. He was tall and thin—apparently about thirty years of age—with a sallow complexion and sandy-white hair. He had small, sharp, piercing gray eyes; and his whiskers, instead of growing continuously from the region of the ear to the chin, were confined to two tufts low down on the lower jaws—or the jowls, to use a somewhat vulgar name. He was dressed in a suit of black, the rustiness and threadbare condition of which were so great as to be easily discerned even in the semi-obscurity of the place. His hat, with very narrow brims, and tapering away towards the crown so as to have a chimney-pot appearance, was napless and battered: but he nevertheless wore it airily perched above his right ear, so as to give himself a jaunty look. His linen was by no means of the cleanest: his shirt-collar was very low, so that the long scraggy neck seemed longer and scaggier still save in the throat, where it had a lamp which looked as if he had swallowed an apple that had stuck half way down. He wore those shoes which are denominated “high-lows;” and as his trousers were too short for him, the dingy white stockings were seen between. The coat-sleeves were proportionately short,—not reaching even to the wrist: he had no gloves—but carried a stick in one hand, and flourished a gaudy bandanna handkerchief in the other.

Such was the individual who was thus eyeing me with interest and attention; and as he stood for nearly a couple of minutes with

his piercing gray eyes fixed upon me, I had ample leisure to study his appearance in return. At length he accosted me; and laying one of his hands upon my shoulder, said in a quick sharp manner, "You seem in distress, youngster?"

"I am indeed," was my response; and no longer able to subdue my feelings, I burst into tears.

"Now, if this is a dodge," said the singular individual, "it's so uncommon clever that it beats into fits anything I ever knew before: and it *must* be a deuced clever dodge to come the counterfeit over me:"—then, having again surveyed me very hard for another minute, he cried, "No, it isn't a dodge: it's real! Who are you? where do you come from? and what's the matter with you?"

"I have come from the country," was my answer, "in the hope of finding some employment in London: but I have been disappointed."

"Have you got a character, either written or in the shape of a reference?" demanded my new acquaintance.

"No," I answered most ingenuously. "I did not think it necessary to prove that I was honest, since I have never done anything wrong."

"Green!—green as grass!" ejaculated the man. "But you speak uncommonly well: you are a decent looking boy—Come, tell me—I suppose the fact is you have run away from home?"

"Home!" I echoed, half bitterly, half-mournfully, "I have no home."

"Well, but you have been to school—you can read and write, I suppose—and all that sort of thing?"

"I have received a good education." I eagerly replied: for I

clutched at the hope that the stranger might help me to some situation. "I have learnt history, geography, arithmetic, the use of the globes, and Latin as far as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*."

"Then the deuce is in it," quickly exclaimed my new friend, "if we can't metamorphose you into something. Come along with me."

I could have flung my arms round his neck and embraced him, —ugly, sinister-looking, and meanly clad though he were: for I only beheld in him a friend whom heaven had suddenly sent to save me from starvation in the streets. But he did not afford me an opportunity of bestowing that testimonial of my affectionate gratitude: for, seizing me by the hand, he led me hurriedly along the street. I no longer felt tired —nor did I feel that my feet were cut and bleeding, my shoes and stockings being completely worn through. We passed out of that street, through several thoroughfares, into a maze of lanes and alleys, with numerous courts leading out—and which district my companion informed me was called Clerkenwell. At length we turned into a court narrower and darker than any other which I had as yet seen—and stopped at a door, at which my companion knocked. It was opened by an elderly woman with grizzly gray hair, and whose countenance of flaming red was rendered still more rubicund by the light of the candle which she carried in her hand.

"Lend us this light," said my friend: and snatching it from her, he led me into a room opening from the narrow passage on the ground floor.

## CHAPTER III.

## • MY NEW FRIEND.

THE place into which I thus found myself conducted was dirty to a degree, and wretchedly furnished with a miserable rickety table, half-a dozen rush-buttoned chairs in an advanced state of dilapidation, and a desk covered with papers at the curtainless window. A door communicated with an inner room; and as it stood open, I caught a glimpse of a bed stretched upon the floor. Such was the result of the first glance which I threw around: but my attention was speedily called to a more cheering spectacle, as my new friend, opening a cupboard, proceeded to place a loaf, part of Dutch cheese, and some cold meat upon the table. He then told me to "peg away," while he went and fetched some beer;—saying which, he quitted the house. In a few minutes he returned, bringing a quart of beer in one hand, and a bottle half-filled with spirits in the other. I gladly portook of the former liquor: for now that I was once more seated, I experienced a return of that sense of weariness amounting almost to exhaustion, which had compelled me to sit down upon the doorstep where my new acquaintance had found me.

"Now, youngster," he said, as soon as I had finished my supper,—"and I believe I never ate so ravenously before in all my life. —"you can go and get to bed as soon as you like; for I see that you are thoroughly knocked up. You may take possession of my crib; and I will make myself a shake-down in this room when I have done my glass and my pipe. We will postpone all talk upon business till to-morrow morning. But, by the bye, what's your name?"

"Joseph Wilmot," I answered.

"And a very fine one it is too—especially the *Wilmot*. Mine is Taddy—Mr. Taddy to those that I am not familiar with; but Tom Taddy to intimate friends. And now good night."

I expressed my thanks to Mr. Taddy for his kindness towards me: he bade me take the candle, as he could smoke and drink in the dark until I had got to bed; and I accordingly retired to the inner room. This contained little more than the bed upon the floor—a large earthenware pan upon a chair, to wash in—and a huge stone jug to contain water. Mr. Taddy's lodging was therefore of a most wretched description: but I was too thankful for having obtained an asylum to suffer myself to find fault with it—and too tired to do so, even if I had been inclined. I lay down; and in a few minutes was fast asleep. When I awoke in the morning, my first impression was that I was still at school, and that I had been hurried through the varied phases of a dream in which whole days appeared to have passed; but as I looked around that wretched room, I was too forcibly reminded of the sad change which had taken place in my condition to be able to doubt its reality any longer. My heart sickened at the thought; and in comparison with the poverty-stricken place where I now found myself, the dormitory at the school appeared a perfect paradise. In order to escape from the bitterness of my reflections, I rose and dressed myself as quickly as I could; and scarcely had I finished, when Mr. Taddy threw open the door, exclaiming, "Well, youngster, I hope you liked your quarters?"

"Yes, thank you," I answered. "But I do not see where you have slept; and I am afraid that I must have deprived you—"

"Of my bed?" he ejaculated. "Nonsense! I slept where I tumbled down:"—then, perceiving that I was opening my eyes in astonishment, he went on to say, "Yes, it's quite true. I drank all that stuff which the publican calls gin, but which is two-thirds vitriol; and where I fell, there I lay—and there I slept. Now for a wash—then to breakfast—and then to business. You light the fire, Joe, and put the kettle on to boil. You will find a couple of herrings in the cupboard: put them in the skillet, and hang them in front of the fire."

All these instructions I obeyed as well as I was able; and when Mr. Taddy had finished his ablutions, he recreated himself with a pipe until breakfast was ready. All the time the meal lasted, I wondered what could be the nature of that business to which he alluded, and in which I was evidently to play a part. I was not kept very long in suspense: for so soon as I had cleared away the breakfast things, my companion said, 'Now, Joe, seat yourself at that desk, and write down something to give me a specimen of your hand.'

"What shall I write?" I inquired.

"Anything. Only three or four words, that I may see what sort of a fist you make of it, and whether the coveys that I do business with can read it. Write one or two of your school copies, if you like, in a good bold round hand. I write such a precious scrawl that I do believe it's the reason my business hasn't taken better than it has; and that's the reason too why I resolved to employ a clerk. So I saw that you were a likely lad to suit me,—and now to work."

I accordingly sat down at the desk; and in pursuance of the hint which Mr. Taddy had given me, I wrote these three favourite

school copies in my best round hand:—'Virtue is commendable.'—"Honesty is the best policy."—"Integrity is its own reward." Being well satisfied with my performance, I rather expected to receive the emphatic approval of Mr. Taddy: but when I presented him the paper, and he glanced over its contents, he burst forth into such an immoderate fit of laughter that I was quite confused. He rolled upon his chair—the tears came into his eyes—again and again did the peals of merriment burst forth; and if he had been a stout person, instead of the lean, lank individual he was, he would certainly have gone off in a fit of apoplexy. For five good minutes did this uproarious mirth continue; and even when it began to subside, he could only give utterance to his comments upon my caligraphic performance in broken sentences.

"Capital, youngster!" he cried. "nothing could be better. *Virtue is commendable*:"—and here he literally shrieked out with renewed merriment, *Honesty is the best policy*." By Jove! you will kill me with laughing. *Integrity is its own reward*:"—and then his merriment exploded in a perfect roar. "However, the writing is admirable; and that is the essential. The texts, I think, we may dispense with in the circulars we have got to write. They won't exactly suit the ladies and gentlemen with whom we have to deal. Now, take your pen; and I will smoke a pipe and dictate at the same time."

I scarcely comprehended the meaning of that violent mirth which my lucubrations had produced: but having no reason to be annoyed, inasmuch as it was better to excite laughter than anger, I took my place at the desk and prepared to write.

"Now then," said Mr. Taddy,

"be careful to cross all your *t*'s and dot all your *i*'s. Are you ready? Well, begin in this way: —Mr. Thomas Taddy, of No. 3, Ragamuffin Court, Saffron Hill, begs to inform ladies and gentlemen who practise the honourable profession of begging, that he has opened an office of the highest respectability for the register of all announcements, wants, interests, and requirments connected therewith. He believes that an establishment of this nature has been long needed in the British metropolis; and in soliciting favours, he will study his best to give perfect satisfaction. Mr. Taddy having much experience in all things regarding the profession. In the first instance, he begs to announce that he has up on his register a number of children to be let out at sixpence a day and their victuals,—some of whom are subject to fits, and will be sure to excite the utmost sympathy. *Item*, Mr. Taddy contracts to furnish toilets of every description of rags and tatters for male and female. Ladies and gentlemen are requested to inspect the goods. *Item*, Mr. Taddy has contracted with a lucifer match manufactory for the supply of a thousand boxes weekly: these are warranted, and would be found a most eligible bargain for ladies and gentlemen making their rounds as *timber merchants*."\*

I had gone on thus far writing in a sort of bewilderment: but at length it struck me that my new acquaintance was naturally a person of a most humorous character, and that this was a joke in which he was indulging. I therefore laid down my pen and made bold to laugh: whereupon Mr. Taddy vociferated in a savage tone,

"Fire away, you young rascal—or I will give you something to grin for."

I was astounded and frightened by this sudden change in his mood, and settled myself as soon as possible to continue writing.

"*Item*," he continued, "Mr. Taddy has a hundred thousand varieties of Yards of Song for a Penny, all consisting of ballads by the most eminent authors. *Item*, an inexhaustible supply of Last Dying Speeches and Confessions, with blanks left for the names of the persons who are hanged, and which can readily be stamped in at the shortest possible notice by types in hand for the purpose. *Item*, several well-trained dogs for blind men, with chains and collars, and warranted to lead safely through the most crowded thoroughfares; including a very clever black terrier, uncommonly savage, and will bite the heels of any one who does not drop halfpence into the hat. *Item*, a choice assortment of wooden legs and crutches. Mr. Taddy will undertake to draw up petitions, setting forth the most moving narratives of woe and affliction—likewise begging letters—together with testimonials and recommendations, signed by some of the most eminent persons in the kingdom. Mr. Taddy will undertake to negotiate the sale, hire, or transfer of muddy crossings in great thoroughfares, and will supply brooms at the cheapest rate. He will likewise teach the art of drawing ships in chalk upon the pavement, so as to suit gentlemen who personate shipwrecked mariners. He likewise gives instructions in writing with chalk, so that the student may in three lessons be enabled to write '*I am starving*' with the greatest ease and facility. Gentlemen and ladies having good walks, in some parts of the town, and,

\* Beggars going about with matches are thus denominated.

wishing for change of air may hear of the most eligible beats in other parts of the town, by applying at Mr. Taddy's office. Gentlemen or ladies in trouble may obtain witnesses either to speak to character or to prove *alibis*, on application at the office,—the rates of payment varying according to the respectability of appearance which the specific peculiarity of cases may render it needful for the witnesses to present."

I was so disgusted with the avocation thus assigned to me, and which I saw to be perfectly serious, that I once more threw down the pen; and starting up from the seat, exclaimed with a firmness which was inspired by indignation and abhorrence, "You may drive me out to starve in the streets—but I will write no more!"

Mr. Taddy likewise sprang up from his chair; but it was to seize my collar with one hand and his stick with the other, and to commence belabouring me with all his might and main. I cried out for assistance—but none appeared; and my unmerciful castigator exclaimed, "You may bawl till you are hoarse, you young rascal: but nobody will come—and I'll be hanged if I don't reduce you to submission. There now—will you take up the pen again?"

"Never!" I ejaculated, my heart swelling with rage and shame at the treatment I had just experienced. "I will leave you:"—and as he had now let me go, I rushed to the door.

"Not so fast, my boy!" he said, with a sneer, as he caught me by the arm and pulled me back. "You are as much in my power as if you were my own son; and if you have any more of your nonsense, I'll take you up before a magistrate—make you confess that you have run away from

your home, your school, your master, or whatever the real truth is—and have you sent back again."

"No, no—for heaven's sake don't!" I cried, thoroughly believing that he would put his threat into execution, and resolving to make almost any sacrifice of feeling, rather than incur the risk of being sent back to Leicester, to the tender mercies of Mr. Jukes, and be locked up in the workhouse.

"Well, then, be a good boy—and let me have no more of your nonsense," said Mr. Taddy, perceiving that his menace had produced an effect which made me feel myself completely in his power. "Come, take the pen again and finish off as many copies of that circular as you possibly can. I must have at least fifty of them sent round to the low lodging-houses, the cadgers' and trampers' dens, and the rookeries, before night."

I accordingly resumed my seat, and obeyed the orders I had received. I wrote up to one o'clock; and then Mr. Taddy, taking me out with him, proceeded to purchase some meat and potatoes for dinner. On our return to his lodging, I was commanded to cook the victuals,—which I did to the best of my ability; and when the meal was over, he bade me resume my writing. This went on until about six o'clock: we then had tea—and afterwards went out to distribute the circulars at the various places to which he had alluded. We called at such a number of dreadful dens and neighbourhoods that all the strongest feelings of loathing, horror, aversion, and disgust, were by turns excited within me. I beheld the hideous orgies of the vilest and lowest mendicants, male and female: I was introduced into lodging-houses where

scenes of brawling, riot, quarrelling, and fighting were going on: I was conducted into others, as the evening deepened into night, where persons of all ages, from the tenderest to the most mature, and of both sexes, were herding together on beds composed of masses of rotting rags, and where the atmosphere was hot to suffocation and pestentially fetid. Several times did I implore Mr. Taddy not to drag me thus with him any farther: but my prayers were of no avail; he doubtless feared I should run away if left to myself—and therefore he would not lose sight of me for a single instant. It was close upon midnight ere we returned to the lodging: but I was so sick at heart with all I had seen—so thoroughly humiliated, and experiencing such a sense of utter self-abasement at the ordeal I had been dragged through—that I could not touch a morsel of food; and gladly taking advantage of my master's permission to retire to rest, I lay down and literally wept myself off to sleep.

Next day more circulars were written: but as hour after hour passed, and no one came to avail himself of the benefits held out in those already distributed, Mr. Taddy exhibited many signs of disappointment, impatience, and astonishment. He walked to and fro in the room, smoking his pipe, and every now and then breaking forth into such audible ejaculations as these:—"Well, I can't make it out. I should have thought that there would have been hundreds to jump at such offers—and I who have been for the last three months making all arrangements to do the thing well! I thought first of all that it was because my circulars were written in such a precious queer style they couldn't be read: but these are as easy to read as print in a book. However,

we will see what to-morrow brings forth."

Unfortunately the morrow proved as barren in its results as the previous day; and to be brief, an entire week passed without producing a single applicant for any of the advantages held out in Mr. Taddy's circulars. Every evening we sallied forth to distribute those written during the day; and every evening, therefore, was I destined to behold a repetition of the same horrible scenes of debauchery and demoralization as those through which I had been dragged on the first occasion. Each day, too, I experienced unmistakable proofs that my master's funds were ebbing lower and lower. First he discontinued his spirits, and contented himself with beer: then we dined off bread and cheese instead of meat—until at last we had nothing but bread alone to eat and cold water to drink. The landlady of the house—that same horrid-looking woman who opened the door the first night I was introduced thither—clamoured for her rent; and in order to raise funds, Mr. Taddy was compelled to call in a marine-store dealer and sell off for a few shillings the suite of rags and tatters, the ballads and the dying speeches, the crutches and the wooden legs, which constituted his stock, and which I now discovered to have been deposited in another room of the house as a security for arrears of rent previously due to the landlady. No more circulars were written; and Mr. Taddy told me very frankly that he was deliberating in his own mind whether he should turn me adrift to manage for myself, or whether he should try to make me useful in some other way. I was so wretched and desponding that all my spirits seemed to be crushed out of me; and I had not energy

enough to care which alternative he might adopt. Young as I was, I felt wearied of existance.

He appeared to prefer the plan of keeping me with him: but a few days after the sale of his goods, the landlady seized what little furniture he possessed in his rooms; and assisted by a dreadful-looking man,—who, it seems, was her brother—compelled us both to leave the house. Mr. Taddy was very noisy and wrathful: but he was ignominiously thrust forth; and thus, at ten o'clock one night we were homeless and penniless wanderers together.

"Will, Joe," he said, as we issued from Ragamuffin Court, "we must try and keep up our spirits. But where shall we sleep to-night? Either under the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge—or else we will make our way to the fields, and stretch ourselves under a hedge or a hay-rick."

"The fields!" I exclaimed, suddenly cheered by the prospect of getting into the open country once more: for I was hideously sick at my experiences of the metropolis.

"Well, let it be the fields," he said: and we walked on together. We proceeded thus for about an hour and a half, until we cleared the suburbs of the metropolis on the northern side; and being fortunate enough to find a shed in the corner of a field, we lay down in a waggon which was kept there, and slept till morning.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### MENDICITY AND ITS RESULT.

THE sun was shining brightly—the birds were singing merrily in the trees—the face of

nature appeared to wear its happiest smiles: but not even from the serene aspect of the sky nor from the loveliness of the earth could my young heart drink in the slightest inspiration of solace. Mr. Taddy had put into his pocket a comb and a rag that had served as a towel at his lodgings; and leading the way through the fields to the bank of the New River (as he informed me the stream was called), he bade me make myself as nice as possible, as he meant to play "the respectable dodge." From his circulars and his conversation, I comprehended what this meant. He purposed that we should commence a career of mendicancy, assuming as respectable an exterior as under circumstances was possible. I was cruelly shocked at finding such was his determination: but I knew full well that there was no alternative. I had eaten nothing since the afternoon of the preceding day: I was half famished with hunger; and thus the calls of nature, being imperious, forced me into his views. We made our ablutions on the river's bank; and then striking across the fields, we drew near a large and handsome house, situated in the midst of a park where the fleecy sheep were browsing on their emerald carpet, and the deer were frisking about. There was a porter's lodge at the entrance of the carriage-drive leading through the park up to the mansion; and above the palings was a painted board, warning off vagrants under pain of prosecution if found intruding within the enclosure. I shrank back in mingled shame and terror on beholding that intimation: but Mr. Taddy, seizing me roughly by the arm, grasped me with such violence that he almost made me cry out with the pain—saying in a low fierce voice at the same

time, "By heaven, you young hound, if you don't keep quiet and look as demure and miserable as possible, I will flay you alive!"

There was no necessity to tell me to look miserable—for heaven knows I felt so: and Mr. Taddy, drawing forth from his pocket a paper which I immediately recognised as a begging petition I had myself drawn up to his dictation, he rang the bell at the gate. The porter—a stout, surly-looking man—came forth from his lodge; and on perceiving us through the iron bars of the gate, he ordered us to be off, "as he didn't want trampers there." Then Mr. Taddy, assuming the most lugubrious look, began whining and snuffling forth a lamentable ditty—of how he was a respectable but decayed tradesman—how he had been reduced to distress by a series of unavoidable misfortunes—how he had a wife and seven children in a most deplorable condition—how he had come out with his dear son, his beloved eldest boy (indicating me) to beseech the succour of the charitable—and how the memorial he held in his hand was attested by the clergyman of his parish and eighteen persons of repute and eminence who had known him in better days.

While he was giving forth this tirade—which caused me to look up in his countenance with astonishment at the glibness that characterized so atrocious a tissue of falsehoods—an elderly gentleman, mounted on a very beautiful horse, appeared round an angle of the road; and the porter, savagely bidding us "stand back," threw open the gate. The gentleman had something exceedingly mild and benevolent in his look; and as he was passing into the enclosure, his eyes fell upon me. He surveyed me with a compassionate interest; and reining in

his steed, began to feel in his pocket for some money.

"Beg pardon, sir," remarked the porter; "but I don't think this man is deserving of anything, however it may be with the boy: for while he was telling me a whole string of stories—and also that he was the boy's father—the lad looked up in his face in perfect astonishment."

"My boy," said the elderly gentleman, "tell me the truth: is this man your father?"

"Mr. Taddy, who still held my arm in his grasp, pressed it significantly in order to prompt my response: but I said boldly, "No, sir—he is not my father. I am no relation to him."

"Well, sir," observed Mr. Taddy, assuming a most piteous looks after having darted a fiercely diabolical glance at me—"it's true that I am not exactly the boy's father: but let him say whether I didn't take him out of the streets and act as a father to him. We are in very great distress, sir—"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the gentleman: then again fixing his eyes upon me, he said, "Do you wish to continue with this man?"

"Oh, no—no!" I ejaculated, with passionate vehemence: for I was suddenly inspired by the hope that heaven had now sent me a friend to rescue me from the slough of wretchedness and degradation into which I had been plunged. "Give me employment, sir—even the most menial—anything—and I will thankfully accept it—Oh, so thankfully!"

"Very well, my boy," answered the gentleman: "I will not disregard your prayer. Now, my man," he continued, turning towards Taddy, "here is a shilling for you. I have no doubt it is more than you deserve: but take yourself off. Begone, I say—directly!"

added the gentleman sternly, as he saw that my companion still lingered, and was evidently loath to part from me. "I am a justice of the peace; and—"

Mr. Taddy stayed to hear no more: but giving me a spiteful thrust forward, he turned abruptly on his heel and hurried away. The gentleman then bade me follow him up to the mansion—he walking his horse so as not to outstrip me. He said nothing more for the present: but upon reaching the house, desired a footman to take me into the servants' hall, give me some food, and conduct me to the library when I had received refreshment. In the servants' hall I found myself an object of interest with the domestics assembled there: and I overheard some of the observations which passed between them in a low voice. One said that I was a genteel-looking boy: another that I had a certain air of superiority above my present condition; and others spoke to a similar effect. A good breakfast was set before me; and the reader may suppose how much I enjoyed a plentiful meal of good and wholesome food, served up with a cleanliness which appeared to be of the most delicate refinement in contrast with the wretched make-shifts which I had recently known at Mr. Taddy's lodging. When I had finished my repast, the footman to whose charge I had been specially consigned, conducted me to a spacious and handsomely appointed library, where I found the elderly gentleman reading a newspaper, and a young lady, of most exquisite beauty, writing a letter at a desk.

"This is the poor boy, Edith, I was telling you of," observed the gentleman, as I entered.

The young lady laid down her pen; and lifting her angelic countenance, the complexion of

which appeared to be lent her by the purest lily and the softest rose, she gazed upon me with her large blue eyes in a manner expressive of a compassionate interest: then she turned towards the gentleman, and said in a low voice of earnest entreaty, "You will do something for him, dear father—will you not?"

"We shall see, my love," was her sire's response: and addressing himself to me, he said in a benevolent manner, "Tell us, my poor boy, how you came in this deplorable situation and in such objectionable companionship?"

I had previously resolved to observe the fullest candour towards my benefactor: for I felt confident that even if he himself could really do nothing for me, he was too good and kind to send me back to Leicester to be locked up in the workhouse. I therefore gave him my entire history, as frankly as I have narrated it to the reader,—how I had been brought up at the Nelsons' academy—how the death of the schoolmaster had caused the widow to discontinue the business—how I had overheard what took place between herself and Mr. Jukes—how I had escaped from the latter individual—and all I had gone through during my acquaintance with Thomas Taddy. The gentleman and the young lady listened with the deepest attention; and the latter more than once applied her handkerchief to her eyes as I touched upon my sorrows at school and the sufferings I had experienced since I left that academy.

"It is all true, dear papa," I heard her say, though she whispered as she bent forward to her sire: "I am certain it is! There is an air of frankness and sincerity about this poor boy which forbids the suspicion of hypocrisy."

"We shall see, my dear Edith—we shall see," was again her father's response: then, after a few moments' reflection, he said, addressing himself to me, "Now, my boy, if you have spoken truly—as we think you have—something shall be done for you. I shall write by to-day's post to this Mr. Jukes at Leicester—do not be alarmed—do not be frightened—he will not want to fetch you away. So far from seeking to put you into the workhouse, he will be very glad to find that he is so well rid of you."

"There now, dear father," again interjected Edith, in the whispering tones of her musical voice: "see how the poor boy's countenance brightens up again! I am confident he has spoken the truth. You will let him remain here at the Manor until you receive the answer from Leister?"

"Oh, certainly!" was her sire's immediate response, also delivered in a low tone, "Yes," he added aloud, "you shall remain here, my poor boy, for the present; and we will at once see about putting you into a more comfortable suit of raiment."

I express my gratitude for the kindness I was receiving: it was a sincere heartfelt gratitude which I thus poured forth in a voice tremulous with emotion; and as I had no fear in respect to the result of the inquiry to be instituted of Mr. Jukes, it seemed to be as if I had suddenly obtained a permanent footing amongst individuals who would treat me generously. I withdrew from the library, and returned to the servant's hall,—where I perceived that unfeigned pleasure was experienced as I announced that I was to stay beneath that roof for the present. The porter at the lodge had a son of about my

own age: and a suit of that boy's clothing was speedily procured for me—so that I felt clean and comfortable once more.

In respect to the family with which accident had thus made me acquainted, I learnt from the domestic in the servant's hall that the gentleman was named Delmar—that he had two daughters; the elder, whose name was Clara, being married to the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave, who lived in Grosvenor square, London—and the younger being the Miss Edith whom I had seen. I also learnt that Mr. Delmar had been the father of several other children by his late wife—for he was a widower—but that all had died save Clara and Edith: and that there were fifteen years' difference between the ages of the two surviving sisters—Mrs. Mulgrave being past thirty, and Edith only eighteen. It farther appeared that Mrs. Delmar had died soon after the birth of Edith—her heart being broken by grief at beholding so many of her children perish one after the other. Mr. Delmar possessed about five thousand a-year, and being very benevolent and charitable, was beloved by all who knew him.

The return of post from Leicester, brought a reply from Mr. Jukes, fully confirming the statement I had made in every particular. Mr. Delmar sent for me up into the library to communicate this circumstance, and to express his satisfaction at thus finding my narrative so thoroughly borne out. He then went on to day, "There is evidently, Joseph, some strange mystery attached to your birth; but I should advise you to think of it as little as possible, and not to indulge in the hope that the veil will sooner or later be drawn aside: for they are no doubt substantial reasons for the maintenance of that mys-

ter. When you get a little older, you will more fully comprehend what I mean, and will be led to conjecture the cause of your having been abandoned by your parents. We must now speak of what is to be done with you. It is somewhat repugnant to my feelings to make you the proposition I am about to offer, seeing that you have been tolerably well educated and somewhat decently brought up: but I really know not what else I can do for you. If therefore you think fit to become a page in my household, I will give you liberal wages; and you have already seen enough of me and mine to be assured of good treatment. If I were to get you as a clerk into a lawyer's office, or anything of that kind, you might fall in with bad companions—advantage might be taken of your youth and inexperience—and besides which, you could scarcely earn enough, even by the utmost drudgery to remunerate a respectable family for giving you board and lodging. Therefore, I see nothing better that I can do on your behalf—at least for a year or two—then to keep you beneath this roof. You will have but little work of a really menial nature to do—nothing that is positively degrading, nor by which your feelings will be wounded."

I expressed my warmest gratitude to Mr. Delmar for his goodness towards me—assuring him that I only sought to eat the bread of industry; and that so far from hesitating to accept the proposal so generously made, it was much above my most sanguine expectations. He appeared pleased with my answer: and that same day I accompanied the carriage into London—which was about three miles distant—to be measured for my page's dress. In a

few days it was sent home; and I assumed the livery of a domestic servant. But I was by no means distressed nor humiliated thereby: I was only too happy at having obtained a comfortable home, and to be afforded an opportunity of earning my own livelihood.

About a fortnight after my entrance into Mr. Delmar's family, a handsome curricle, drawn by two splendid horses, dashed up the carriage-drive one day towards the mansion. A gentleman and lady, with an elegantly appareled livery-servant, were the occupants of the vehicle. The gentleman himself drove, and took an evident pleasure in the rapid pace and graceful action of the two steeds. He was a man about eight-and-thirty years of age—tall, handsome, and well made. His complexion was somewhat dark: he had an aquiline profile—his eyes were bright and piercing—his hair curled naturally—and he was dressed in the most fashionable style. He had one of those voices which seem to be full of a masculine harmony—deep without being hollow, and full-toned without being loud or sonorous. It was a very pleasing voice, and suited well the handsome person, the elegant appearance, and the polished manners of its possessor. This gentleman was the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave, my benefactor's son-in-law. The lady who accompanied him was his wife; and very different was her style of beauty from that of her sister Edith. She was, as already stated, thirty-three years of age; and though not above the medium height, yet appeared taller on account of the admirable symmetry of her form and the statuesque carriage of her head and bust. She had dark brown hair and deep blue eyes,—the former of extraordinary luxuriance, and with a rich natural gloss

upon it: her complexion was good, but not of the same exquisite purity of white and the same soft blush of the rose which formed that of her sister. It seemed a complexion slightly, but only very slightly touched—I can scarcely say faded—by the gaieties, the festivities, the late hours, and the occupations of fashionable life. Her features were larger than those of Edith—but yet by no means coarse, nor devoid of classical chiselling. She had an air alike commanding and elegant: grace and dignity characterized all her movements; and there was a certain expression of hauteur in her look, as well as in her gait and bearing.

As I have spoken at this length of the elder sister, I will here pause to describe the younger. It has already been said that Edith had a lovely complexion and blue eyes: the former was characterized by all the freshness of youth, unmarred by the heated atmosphere of gilded saloons: the hue of the latter was of a shade lighter than the blue of Clara's eyes, and more nearly approaching the azure—while the other deepened towards the violet. Her hair was of a lighter brown, and might almost be termed chestnut: her lips were of a bright vermillion,—the pearly teeth showing brilliantly when smiles played upon that charming mouth. The form of Clara had the luxuriance of a Hebe blended with the symmetry of a Diana: that of Edith displayed the lithe slenderness and elasticity of a sylph—yet without thinness, and having the modelled contours of just proportions. The disposition of Clara, as read in her countenance at the first glance, was more serious and settled than that of the younger sister,—which was gay and artlessly blithe, without forwardness

or giddiness. The one struck the beholder as being a woman of the world and a star in the circles of fashion: the other as an ingenuous, unsophisticated creature, ignorant of the artificialities and unspoilt by the formal conventionalisms of society.

To return to my narrative. It was a little past the hour of noon when the curricle dashed up to the front entrance of Delmar Manor; and Edith hastened forth to greet her sister. There was something unfeignedly warm in the embrace which Edith bestowed—while the same gush of heartfelt emotion was wanting on the part of Clara, although there was nothing positively cold nor unkind on her side. Mr. Delmar received them in the hall, kissing his elder daughter, and shaking hands with Mr. Mulgrave. As Clara swept her eyes around, she observed me standing at a little distance; and she said quite loud enough to be overheard by me, "I see that you have increased your household, dear father. Where did you pick up that elegant-looking page?"

"I will tell you all about it presently, Clara," responded Mr. Delmar; and thus speaking he led the way into the parlour, followed by his daughters,—Mr. Mulgrave, turning back to the threshold for a few moments to survey with evident pride and satisfaction his elegant equipage as the servant drove it round to the stables. He was then about to enter the parlour, when suddenly stopping short as if recollecting something, he beckoned me towards him,—saying, "By the bye, youngster, there is a small parcel under the front seat of the curricle, which my man knows nothing about. Just run and fetch it in."

As I was hastening away to execute this command, I over-

heard Mr. Mulgrave say to the footman, "Where did the governor get that neat little page?" I did not catch the reply—but hastened after the carriage; and having found the parcel, sped back into the mansion. But as I re-entered the hall, I found Mr. Mulgrave still conversing with the footman. On beholding me, he at once advanced to receive the packet, which I presented to him; and he eyed me with considerable attention,—so that I made sure the footman had been giving him some particulars concerning me, and which methought had excited Mr. Mulgrave's interest—perhaps his compassion. Soon afterwards, when the parlour bell rang and I hastened to respond to the summons. I noticed that Mrs. Mulgrave likewise surveyed me in a similar manner: and my heart swelled with ineffable emotions at finding myself the object of so much sympathy. Mr. Delmar, addressing me in his usual tone of benevolence, desired me to order the footman to serve up luncheon soon; and I hastened to obey these instructions.

In the servants' hall some of the domestics were talking together relative to Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave. It appeared from what they said, that the Mulgraves did not often make their appearance at the Manor, and that there was frequently some little coldness between Mr. Delmar and his son-in-law,—a circumstance which surprised me when I took into consideration the exceeding benevolence of my benefactor's disposition. But from some observations which the servants went on to make, I gathered that it was more than suspected that Mr. Mulgrave lived beyond his means, and that he occasionally had recourse to the purse of his father-in-law, who did not always admire ministering to his extra-

vagances. It also appeared that the Mulgraves maintained great style at their house in Grosvenor Square—gave magnificent parties—and were indeed noted for the mingled sumptuousness and elegance of their entertainments. They had no children, and appeared to abandon themselves altogether to the dissipated pleasures of fashionable life. The discourse of which I thus became a listener, was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Mulgrave's livery-servant, who was a good-looking, well-made young man, of about four or five-and-twenty, and whose Christian name was George.

In the course of the afternoon I was in the garden gathering some fruit for the parlour-dessert when I heard footsteps approaching along the gravel walk; and looking back, beheld Mr. Mulgrave. He was walking in a lounging, sauntering manner; and stopped occasionally to gaze around or to eat some fruit. At length he came close up to the spot where I was occupied: and in a kind voice observed, "I have been listening to the narrative of your adventures, Joseph; and really they amount to a perfect romance. I suppose you are very happy here?"

"Very, sir," I answered enthusiastically

"To be sure," he went on to observe. "But still it must be somewhat dull for a boy of your intelligence and discernment to live cooped up here in the country. The fact is, I want just such a page as you are; and I have been telling my father-in-law that if he has no objection, I will take you off his hands."

I have no doubt the expression of my countenance showed that I was suddenly grieved and troubled by the announcement just

made; for I did not wish to leave Mr. Delmar's service.

"Ah! you object to my proposition?" said Mr. Mulgrave, with a glance of vexation: but instantaneously resuming his wonted affability of manner, he continued to remark, "I think you would like to be in my service, Joseph; and you are a youth of that style which is better fitted for a town mansion than a country seat. You would have plenty of gaiety, variety, and amusement at my house. Besides, I should give you good wages. Now, my boy, what do you say—supposing Mr. Delmar assents?"

"I am bound, sir," was my answer, "to do whatsoever Mr. Delmar wishes: but—" and I stopped short, fearful of giving offence by what I was about to say: for I was on the point of observing that I was not so mercenary nor ungrateful as to be tempted by any increase of wages to leave the service of one who had so generously snatched me from pauperism, misery, and degradation.

"But what?" demanded Mr. Mulgrave. "Speak out, Joseph: tell me where your objection lies."

"Simply in this, sir," I was now emboldened to answer,— "that it was my hope to remain for a long, long time in my present master's service:"—and the tears came into my eyes at the thought that there was even a possibility of my quitting the Manor.

"Well, but you would be as kindly treated with Mrs. Mulgrave and me, as you are here," he went on to observe: "so you had better make up your mind to come. Shall I tell Mr. Delmar that, having taken such a fancy to you, I have spoken to you on the subject and you are by no means unwilling?"

"Oh, no, sir!" I interrupted him immediately: "pray do not say *that*—because, you know, it would not be the truth. I should be very, very sorry to leave Mr. Delmar. At the same time," I almost immediately added, feeling that some such acknowledgment was necessary, "I am deeply grateful to you for the kind interest thus shown on my behalf."

"Well then," ejaculated Mr. Mulgrave, "we will say no more upon the subject. By the bye," he added, after a brief pause, "Mr. Delmar has amused me particularly with his description of those adventures you experienced when living in the companionship of some man—what was his name?"

"I presume, sir, you mean the person called Taddy," I answered, at the same time thinking it odd that after having shown so much interest on my account, Mr. Mulgrave should speak of my bitter sufferings at the wretched lodging as *amusing*.

"Ah, Taddy—that's the name—and rather a queer one it is. But where is it that this strange character lives?"

"I do not know, sir. Perhaps Mr. Delmar omitted to inform you that we were rendered houseless wanderers at the same time."

"To be sure—I recollect," said Mr. Mulgrave, carelessly. "But where was it that this man carried on his precious avocations—or rather attempted to do so?"

"In Ragamuffin Court, Saffron Hill, sir," was my answer.

"Good heavens, what a name! what a place! The very nomenclature is fraught with a whole world of description. I suppose the fellow has never sought you out since you have been at the Manor?"

"No, sir," I rejoined; "and

very sorry indeed should I be if he were to do so."

"To be sure, to be sure," observed Mr. Mulgrave; and then he pursued his way saunteringly through the garden.

I was very much afraid for the remainder of the day lest Mr. Delmar should yield to his son-in-law's wishes, and consent to transfer me to his service; but nothing more was said by any one to me upon the subject; and at about nine o'clock in the evening the Mulgraves took their departure in the beautiful little curriole.

"Joseph," observed Mr. Delmar in the course of the following day, "you made for yourself new friends yesterday. Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave quite envied me the possession of such a page; and I can assure you that my son-in-law was very anxious to have you in his service. But I would not for a moment listen to the proposal; and I do not think, Joseph, that you have any desire to leave me?"

"Oh, no, sir—far, very far from that!" I exclaimed, my heart bounding with delight at the assurance I had just received from my kind master's lips that he was equally disinclined for a separation.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE MUSEUM—THE HUMPPBACK.

THE library of Delmar Manor was a spacious and lofty room—very handsomely furnished—and the shelves of which were crowded with books, being protected from the dust by glass doors. Along the top of the book-cases there was an array of exquisitely sculptured busts and curious old china vases. Com-

municating with this library by means of a glass door, was a smaller room serving as a museum of curiosities and objects of *vertu*. In each of the four corners stood a suit of armour,—those panoplies belonging to four distinct periods of the age when such male defences were worn. There were cases containing specimens of polished marble—others filled with peculiar shells—others with tropical birds and insects, carefully preserved:—others, again presented to the view a variety of mineralogical specimens; and in addition to these there was a miscellaneous collection of old jars, porcelains, and vases, of all sorts and shapes and belonging to all ages.

One day, about a week after the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, I had occasion to enter the library to deliver a letter to Mr. Delmar, who was seated there; and with his wonted kindness of manner, he kept me in conversation for a few minutes. He spoke to me about books—told me that I was most welcome to take volumes from the library for the recreation of my leisure hours—and pointed out a shelf where he thought I should find those which were most suitable and proper for my perusal. He then took me into the museum, as the smaller room adjoining was denominatated; and as this was the first time I had been there—the first time, too, that I had ever seen suits of armour—I was much interested with the contents of the apartment. Mr. Delmar, observing that the dust had entered some of the glass cases, and that several of the ornithological and entomological specimens had fallen down or become otherwise disarranged, asked me if I thought I could cleanse the cases carefully and restore the objects just mentioned to their proper

position? I at once assured him that I would undertake the task, with the certainty of fulfilling it to his complete satisfaction. He accordingly instructed me to commence at once: and having procured all that was requisite for the purpose, I shut myself in the museum and entered upon the work.

This was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon; and soon after I began, Mr. Delmar went out for a ride on horseback with Miss Edith, who was very fond of equestrian exercise. A little before one o'clock I heard the library door open again: and drawing aside the curtain of the glass door to see who was entering, I perceived that it was Mr. Delmar, who having returned from his ride, sat down again to continue the perusal of some volume in which he seemed deeply interested. He did not enter the museum to observe how I was acquitting myself of the task entrusted to me; and I therefore concluded that he had forgotten my presence there. The work which I had to do made no noise; and there was consequently nothing to remind my master of my being in the museum.

A few minutes after he had returned to the library, I heard the door again open, and Edward the footman announced Mr. Mulgrave. I went on with my work, the thought never striking me that any conversation of a private character was about to take place between my master and his son-in-law. Indeed, I myself was so interested in the task which I had undertaken, and was so absorbed in the purpose of executing it with the utmost carefulness, that though I heard the voices of those gentlemen talking in the library, I for some time remained totally unconscious of the subject of their discourse. At length I was

suddenly startled by hearing Mr. Delmar speak in a louder and more excited tone than I had ever before noticed during the short time I had been in his service.

"No, Augustus," he exclaimed; "I will not do it! Listen—do not interrupt me. You have now been married to Clara ten years: and during that period you have received from me no less than fourteen thousand pounds, in addition to the ten thousand I gave her as a dowry. Your extravagances, sir, are past all endurance. I have remonstrated with you gently and kindly—I have spoken to you angrily—I have discoursed seriously, and I hope in a manner consistent with my duty as your father-in-law: but all to no purpose. It is invariably the same story. Fresh debts—fresh promises of retrenchment—and renewed disregard for all these pledges so solemnly given. Your brother, Lord Eccleston, who so generously allows you fifteen hundred a year, is likewise wearied of your incessant importunities—"

"Importunities?" echoed Mr. Mulgrave, with the startled abruptness of anger: "this is a hard word, sir."

"I grieve, Augustus," replied Mr. Delmar, more mildly than for the last few minutes he had been speaking,—"I am truly and deeply grieved to be compelled to use it: but I am forced to speak plainly. Your brother has a large family to support; and you cannot deny that he has done his best for you. For Heaven's sake do not weary on his patience by too frequent demands upon his purse! As for myself, I am determined not to minister any longer to your extravagances."

"But, my dear sir," urged Mr. Mulgrave, now adopting a tone of entreaty, "do consider the

position in which I am placed. What is fifteen hundred a year to keep up a certain degree of style?"

"Fifteen hundred a year," rejoined Mr. Delmar, "for a couple who have no children, is an ample revenue. With proper economy it will enable you to maintain the establishment in Grosvenor Square, although as you are well aware, it was against my wish that you removed thither from the cheaper dwelling you occupied for the first two or three years of your marriage. But if you will constantly be giving the most sumptuous parties—if every two or three months you make some fresh purchase of horses—if you bet upon races,—and what is more fatal still, Augustus, if you frequent Crockford's gambling den—for I can call it nothing else—it is no wonder that you should be in constant difficulties, and that you require almost as many thousands as you possess hundreds."

"Well, sir," returned Mulgrave, still in a submissive manner, "I know there is a great deal of truth in what you say: but if for this once you will extricate me from the difficulty in which I am placed—It is but a couple of thousand pounds I ask at your hands—"

"See, Augustus," interrupted Mr. Delmar, "how lightly you talk of a very large sum. Only a couple of thousand pounds! It is more than your whole year's income; and yet it is all to go in an hour, or a minute, to pay off debts. Now listen to me: for matters have come to that crisis which renders it necessary that I should give you a few explanations."

There was a brief pause, during which I was about to open the door and pass away from a place where I was thus rendered an un-

willing listener of the painful scene that was in progress: but at the very moment my fingers touched the handle Mr. Delmar resumed his discourse;—and he spoke in such a solemn tone—indeed there was something so awe-inspiring in the first words that he went on to speak—that I hung back, not daring to obtrude myself: for, as the reader will understand, in order to leave the museum, it was absolutely necessary to pass through the library.

"When my lamented wife was stretched upon her death-bed," continued Mr. Delmar,—"and when, almost heart-broken, I knelt by the side of that couch, sacredly and fervently promising that whatever her last instructions might be, they should receive the completest fulfilment,—she implored me to leave my property at my death equally between our two surviving children. These, as you know, were Clara and Edith. I gave a solemn pledge to that effect: indeed, such would have been my intention even without that last injunction of my poor dying wife. My will has been made in that sense; this writing-desk contains it, and not for worlds would I make the slightest alteration in its provisions. Now perhaps, Augustus, you begin to understand to what end these explanations are to lead: for if year after year I am thus called upon to advance large sums in support of your extravagances, you will find that the share of my property which is to devolve to Clara will be woefully diminished. All the money hitherto advanced—including even the ten thousand pounds which formed her dowry—has been duly taken into account; and it is so much the less that you will have to receive when it shall please heaven to remove me hence. Now, Augustus, you comprehend the exact position

in which, as my elder daughter's husband, you are placed. If you have no regard for Clara's welfare—the welfare of your own wife—it is my duty to take measures to ensure her against that eventual distress which will inevitably be brought about by the course you are pursuing, unless you quickly and effectively reform your conduct. But having given you these explanations, I will afford you one more chance. You shall have the two thousand pounds which your present necessities demand: but if with this knowledge of the exact position wherein you are placed with regard to my will, you again call upon me for pecuniary purposes, —rest assured that, painful though such a course would be for me, you will meet with a stern refusal. Now we will say no more upon the subject; and I will write you a cheque for the sum you require."

There was another pause; and as I supposed the painful scene to be altogether at an end, I no longer thought it necessary to leave the museum. I felt sorry at having remained there during a discourse of so entirely a private and domestic nature: but I had been rendered an unwilling listener—and it was utterly impossible to close my ears against a conversation which through the glass door was so plainly audible.

"Accept my best thanks," said Mr. Mulgrave, doubtless as the cheque was placed in his hand: "and rely upon my promise to retrench. I will now take my departure and settle this unpleasant business as quick as possible: for I am really afraid I shall find an execution in the house when I get home. By the bye, as one means of retrenchment, I will get rid of the under-footman and take a page in his stead: it will be much more economical. I suppose you

have made up your mind to keep that boy—what's his name?"

"You mean Joseph," said Mr. Delmar—"the lad you saw the other day?"

"Yes," replied Mulgrave. "I think you might just as well let me have him—"

"No, Augustus," interrupted my kind master—and his response relieved me from a feeling of acute suspense which had suddenly seized upon me; "the boy is happy here—he is a good boy too—and I mean to keep him. Perhaps it may sooner or later be discovered who he really is: the mystery of his birth may be cleared up;—and should it transpire, as there is every reason to suppose, that his parents (if living) move in a genteel sphere of life, I should be sorry if he were to be handed over to them otherwise than as one who had effectually escaped the temptations, the snares, and the vices with which the metropolis abounds. So I am resolved to keep him."

"Oh, of course!" ejaculated the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave. "I only thought that if you really had no use for him, I could take him off your hands. But as you seem resolved to keep him, well and good: and I am glad of it—for he is really a nice boy, and I felt much interested in him."

Mr. Mulgrave and Mr. Delmar then quitted the library together; and it appeared perfectly clear to me that my master had not supposed me to be in the museum. Indeed, if he had remembered at all the task entrusted to me, he most probably thought that I was down in the servants' hall during the preceding scene: but it happened that the dinner was later there than usual on this particular day, and the bell to summon the servants had not as yet rung. It began to ring a few minutes after my master and Mr. Mulgrave.

had issued from the library : and I lost no time in repairing to the servants' hall in obedience to the summons. When dinner was over, I returned to the museum, but Mr Delmar came not back to the library during the afternoon; and I found that he had taken Miss Edith out for a walk. The next time he saw me—which was in the evening—he said nothing to show that the thought had in the interval occurred to him that I might have been in the museum while that painful scene was passing with his son-in-law;—and of course I said nothing upon the subject. Nor did I mention to a single soul what I had thus overheard.

Three or four days passed, and my work in the museum was concluded to the entire satisfaction of Mr. Delmar. One afternoon, as I was up in my chamber, I observed a hackney-coach rumbling along the carriage-drive towards the entrance of the mansion: but I did not perceive who alighted as the window of my room was on the side of the house, and commanded not a view of the front. I had just finished putting on my livery, when Edward the footman entered my chamber to tell me that I was wanted in the parlour down stairs. It was unusual for me to be thus specially fetched ; and the recollection of that hackney-coach flashing back to my mind, I was instantaneously struck with the idea of something wrong,—but I knew not what. I asked Edward wherefore I was wanted ? He did not know ; but said that two strange men, whom he had never seen before, and one of whom was a hump-backed dwarf, were with Mr. Delmar. They had however given no name ; and he was utterly at a loss to conjecture what their business might be. He saw that I looked uneasy, and some-

thing to cheer me : for he was a very good-natured man, and I had become a great favourite not only with him, but also with the other servants.

I lost no time in descending to the parlour; and I remember that my heart palpitated and I felt a feverish kind of nervousness: for notwithstanding Edward's cheering words, the dread of something wrong was uppermost in my mind. On opening the parlour door, I was seized with perfect consternation on beholding Mr. Jukes seated in that room !

Mr. Delmar was standing behind a chair, on which he leant with both his hands; and the quick appealing glance which I threw upon him, showed me that his countenance wore an expression of ominous misgiving. But before I go on to explain what took place, I will endeavour to depict the appearance of the third person whom I found there. He was, as Edward had described him, a very short man, much deformed, with a humped shoulder greatly protruding. He was apparently about fifty years of age—with harsh iron-gray hair—shaggy overhanging brows—and a cadaverous countenance, marked with the small-box. He had a cunning, apish, disagreeable look—not merely disagreeable, but repulsive, and one from which it was impossible to help recoiling. His deep-set eyes partly resembled those of the weasel and partly those of the snake. The light seemed hanging as it were in their depths ; and he looked out with a cold but searching gaze, penetrating and hideously fascinating. He was apparelled in a suit of black, evidently quite new: his hands were of enormous size—his arms exceedingly long: his legs were very short—and his enormous feet were cased in shoes with the strings tied in large

bows. Altogether he had the appearance of a baboon dressed up. It was not however at the first glance that I scrutinized him sufficiently to be enabled to record this description: for, as I have already said, I was seized with consternation on beholding Mr. Jukes; and the serious look of foreboding which Mr. Delmar wore was but little calculated to inspire me with courage.

The dwarfish humpback leapt down from his chair, and hastening across the room towards me, appeared about to extend his arms—I knew not whether to embrace or knock me down,—when Mr. Delmar, as if suddenly struck by a thought sprang after him; and holding him back, said quickly, “Stop, sir—let us break it gently.”

“Ah, to be sure—quite right—very prudent indeed,” responded the humpback, his voice having a sort of rattling, husky, jarring sound, which grated terribly upon the ears, while his apish mouth grinned significantly on one side, as he glanced up over his deformed shoulder at Mr. Delmar.

“How do you do, Joseph?” said Mr. Jukes to me, as he nodded his head in half-familiar, half-patronizing manner; and his countenance had put off its sternness now.

I did not answer: I was bewildered with terror and suspense. What did all this mean? why was Jukes there? who was the humpback? wherefore did Mr. Delmar look mournfully serious? and what was the intelligence that had to be broken to me?

“Joseph,” said my kind master, taking me by the hand and leading me a little on one side—while the humpback turned to converse in a whisper with Mr. Jukes,—“Joseph, my dear boy,”—and the exceeding benevolence of Mr. Delmar’s voice and look tended

to aggravate my misgivings; for I felt that so much sympathy could only be the precursor of some very disagreeable intelligence: “I have an important communication to make. Prepare yourself to hear it—do not be excited—perhaps you will be rejoiced:” and yet the expression of his features was utterly at variance with the hope which he had thus thrown out.

I tried to speak; I longed to be put out of suspense: but I could not give utterance to a word, I was gasping: my throat felt as if I had swallowed ashes; and I must have been pale as death,—for the anguish of feeling I experienced and the mortal terror that was upon me were supreme.

“Yes, Joseph,” resumed Mr. Delmar, who, though he understood the agony of suspense I was enduring, was yet evidently loath to communicate what would put an immediate end thereto; “it is a very important piece of intelligence which I have to impart. You are about to leave me, Joseph

—”

“No, sir—no—never!” I shrieked forth, the wildness of my despair suddenly unlocking my tongue and finding a vent in words. “Never, never!”—and falling on my knees, I clung with my arms clasped around Mr. Delmar’s legs. “For God’s sake do not cast me off, sir! for God’s sake do not!”

As I thus spoke in a rending tone, I threw my shuddering look towards the humpback; for the conviction was strong in my mind that it was to this individual’s care, through the agency of Mr. Jukes, I was to be handed over, and at the moment I would sooner have been hurled amidst the slimy folds of a coiled-up boa-constrictor, than be assigned to the power of that horrible lump of deformity. From his countenance those shuddering looks of

mine were quickly reverted with the strongest recoil ; for it struck me that there was something terribly malignant in his eyes as they surveyed me from beneath the shaggy overhanging brows, like a reptile looking out from a cave edged with furze. I beheld a tear trembling on Mr. Delmar's lashes he hastily brushed it away ; and assuming the air of one who musters all his strength of mind for the performance of a duty as painful as it is imperious, he said "Rise, Joseph—and listen to what I have to say. You must hear it, my poor boy, sooner or later ; and it is better you should know it at once."

I did rise ; and I stood pale and trembling, with dismay and terror depicted on my countenance —my looks again darting towards the humpback, and then being as quickly reverted to the benevolent countenance of Mr. Delmar. Oh ! what a contrast between the villainous features of the former, and the serene but serious philanthropy expressed in those of the latter !

"Yes, Joseph—it is indeed true" continued my master, "you are about to leave me. But heaven knows with what sincerity I declare it is against my own inclination ! Cast you off, my boy ?—no, never—I could not have done so ! But that person—that gentleman," he added, correcting himself, as if the first term he had used constituted an incivility—"has certain claims—"

"What claims ?" I demanded with excited vehemence ; "what claims ?"—for Mr. Delmar, as he spoke, had glanced towards the humpback.

"That gentleman—Mr. Lanover," continued my master, "has been led by the advertisements which Mrs. Nelson inserted in the newspapers, to inquire after you : for he is—he is—"

"What ?—in the name of God, what ?" I inquired, gasping forth the words ; for I felt a sudden faintness at the heart—a sickness—a sensation as if the blood were running down into my feet, and that thus life was on the point of ebbing quick out of me through my extremities."

"That gentleman—Mr. Lanover—is your uncle :"—and Mr. Delmar spoke with a hesitation amounting almost to aversion.

"My uncle !" I murmured : and I staggered back against the wall.

"Yes—my dear Joseph," said the humpback, now again advancing towards me, and speaking in his harsh disagreeable voice ; "I am your uncle. Your father and mother are dead—I am your nearest relative—I come to take you home—Embrace me."

I endeavoured to be calm ; I exerted all the power of my youthful being to control the wild rush of horrified feelings that were surging up within me. The effort I thus made was stupendous : but those feelings were stronger than myself—horror, loathing, disgust, abhorrence, terror, and aversion, were all concentrated therein ; and as he approached closer towards me, I shrieked forth, "No, no !" covering my face with my hands as if to shut out a hideous monster from my view.

"Well, this is pretty, upon my word," said Mr. Lonover, stopping short,

"Joseph, I am ashamed of you," observed Mr. Jukes, in a voice of deprecating severity, "Mrs. Nelson, I am sure, never brought you up to such undutiful disobedience as this. You ought to fling yourself into the arms of this kind, good uncle, who is going to take you to a happy home."

"No, no !" I again screamed out. "I will stay with Mr. Del-

mar:"—but as I abruptly withdrew my hands from my countenance and turned a look of entreaty on my kind master, I was smitten with despair on seeing that he shook his head gloomily.

At this moment the door opened; and Edith Delmar—who, as I afterwards learnt, had heard in another room my piercing ejaculations—suddenly made her appearance. She seemed to me like a guardian angel: there was hope in the presence of that bright and beautiful creature. I flew towards her; and throwing myself at her feet, exclaimed passionately, "Save me, Miss Delmar—Oh, save me from that dreadful man!"—and I pointed towards Lanover.

"Save you, my poor boy," repeated Edith, her eyes sweeping round in astonishment upon the scene: and then her looks recoiled from the humpback with an abhorrence which, despite her good breeding and the natural generosity of her heart, she could not possibly conceal.

"Rise, Joseph—rise," said Mr. Delmar, hastening forward to catch me by the arm and lift me up from my suppliant posture. "You know that both I and my daughter would do whatever we could to serve you: but the claims of a relative are, I fear, paramount."

"A relative?" said Edith, inquiringly.

"Yes, my dear," responded Mr. Delmar: then, as he indicated the dwarf, he went on to observe, "This gentleman proclaims himself to be Joseph's uncle. He saw the advertisements inserted by Mrs. Nelson in the newspapers, calling upon the friends or relations of Joseph Wilmot to come forward. He proceeded to Leicester; and hearing something that led him to apply to Mr. Jukes, he learnt

under what circumstances Joseph had left that city and where he was now to be found. Mr. Jukes, in his capacity of a Poor Law Guardian of Leicester, considered it right and proper to accompany Mr. Lanover to London, to see that Joseph was duly assigned to his care. Certain particulars have been given me by Mr. Lanover in respect to Joseph's parentage: but it is unnecessary to mention them."

I listened with a wild trepidation to these explanations: and when they were finished, I darted my appealing looks first at Mr. Delmar, then at his daughter—then back again upon the father, and once more upon Edith. The young lady was evidently much distressed; and I am certain that she entered fully into the feeling of abhorrence and disgust which I entertained in respect to Mr. Lanover. For a moment—but only for a moment—my soul was smitten with remorse and sorrows at the betrayal of feelings into which I had been led in respect to one who, proclaiming himself my uncle, sought to embrace me and offered me a home. But the next instant that compunctionous sensation passed away: for when I again bent my shuddering looks upon the repulsive countenance of the hideous monster, I felt that I never could acknowledge him as my uncle—and that even if he had announced himself as my father, I should have recoiled from him with the same insurmountable repugnance. I could not help it;—the feeling struck me as being unnatural, ungrateful, and wicked; but I had no power over volition—I was not master of myself—I could no more control my own sensations than I could have quieted the raging eddies of the Maelstrom. "But perhaps," suggested Edith "as Joseph feels happy here, Mr.

Lanover will allow him to remain?"

"If you will," cried Mr. Delmar eagerly, "his livery shall be put off, and he shall be treated in a different manner."

"You are very kind," responded the humpback: and methought (but I afterwards reflected it might be mere fancy) that his apish mouth grinned malignantly: "you are very kind—but it is my duty to take charge of my nephew. When he comes to know me better, he will like me; and I shall forgive him this little ebullition of feeling which he has displayed towards me."

"If you wish me well," I exclaimed with continued vehemence, "leave me where I am! In that case I shall be no burthen upon you—nor will I eat the bread of idleness here. I will work for my food. Leave me therefore—leave me!"

"Well, I never saw such a boy," said Mr. Jukes, affecting to hold up his hands in amazement. "There is his kind uncle—"

"Come, Joseph—you must come," said the dwarf, quickly: and he again advanced towards me.

"No, no!" I once more shrieked out, and rushed behind Mr. Delmar for protection,—clinging to that gentleman as if to the only barrier between myself and the vortex of despair. My good master was evidently irresolute how to act. Edith approached him; and I heard her whisper in his ear, in a tone of entreaty, "Do consider, dear father, whether there be not some means of saving the poor boy from a fate which he views with such horror.

"Well," said Mr. Delmar, as if suddenly inspired by a thought, "I must take time, Mr. Lanover, to decide upon the course to be adopted.

"Oh! my heart's gratitude is

yours, sir—and yours, too, miss," I said in a tone which though fervent, was nevertheless so low as only to reach their ears.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Lanover, in a fierce voice. "What need is there for consideration? The boy is my nephew—I claim him, and I will have him."

"If you put the matter in this light," answered Mr. Delmar, "I shall assume the same high tone. Remember, sir, I have only your bare word for the claim you assert upon the lad: you have given me no documentary proof."

"This is truly ridiculous," rejoined the humpback, with a sneer. "Ask Mr. Jukes whether, when I sought him out at Leicester, I did not already know everything concerning the lad—how he was entrusted to the Nelsons, and all about him. And how could I have known this, if I were not his relation?"

"It's quite true, sir," observed Jukes, addressing himself to Mr. Delmar. "Mr. Lanover knew all about Joseph; and he told me at once those particulars respecting the boy's birth which he just now described to you. Joseph's mother was Mr. Lanover's sister—"

"But still," interrupted Mr. Delmar, "I must have documentary proof of these averments. It is a serious thing to surrender up a mere child like this to a stranger.

"What nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Lanover. "Stranger indeed?—an uncle is no stranger. I am a respectable man, living on my means; you can inquire about me if you like. My house is Number —, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. I have a wife and daughter —. But why should I stand arguing here? I insist, sir, that you give up the boy at once."

Mr. Delmar made no immediate response. I was still crouching behind him, and therefore could

not see his face: but I judged that it expressed a return of irresolution, because Edith flung upon her father another look of anxious entreaty on my behalf. Oh, how I blessed her for it!—aye, I did so there and then, even amidst the whirl of my terribly excited feelings.

"Yes, sir," Mr. Jukes, again putting in his word: "it's my duty to see the boy given up to his relation. He became chargeable to the parish of which I am guardian; and I am bound to assure myself that he is placed in the hands of one who will prevent him from being thrown back upon us at Leicester."

"Now I have made up my mind how to act," suddenly observed Mr. Delmar, in a tone of firm decision. "With respect to you, Mr. Jukes, I will send you a written undertaking by the post—an undertaking which my attorney shall draw up—to save Joseph Wilmot from becoming chargeable to your parish, or to meet all the costs if he should. So you, sir, have nothing more to do with the matter. In respect to you, Mr. Lanover, I am a justice of the peace, and I will treat the case magisterially. I decline therefore to deliver up this boy until you produce documentary evidence of a certain character,—amongst which must be the marriage certificate of your deceased sister with Mr. Wilmot, so as to prove that Joseph was born in wedlock: otherwise you can assert no uncle's claim upon him. Bring me such documentary evidence, and I will no longer oppose your demand. If you do not like this course, you have your remedy—you can apply to the proper tribunals—and I will meet you there. Now, sir, you have my decision; and it is needless to prolong this painful interview."

"Oh, very well!" ejaculated Mr. Lanover, in the harsh jarring sounds of his disagreeable voice—now rendered more than ever disagreeable by the concentrated rage which was expressed in its accents; "I will make you smart for this! My attorney shall enter an action against you—"

"Spare your threats, sir," responded Delmar, sternly: "your lawyer can have the address of mine whenever he chooses."

"Then he will send for it tomorrow," rejoined the humpback. "Come Mr. Jukes—we will take ourselves off; and if there's justice in England, I will have it."

Mr. Delmar condescended to give no farther reply; and the two men quitted the room, the humpback banging the door violently behind him. No sooner had they disappeared, then with feelings of unspeakable relief I threw myself upon my knees at the feet of Mr. Delmar and his daughter, and poured forth my gratitude as well as I was able. But my voice was half suffocated with the emotions that seemed to come up into my very throat; and the tears rained down my cheeks. They spoke to me in the kindest and most soothing manner,—Mr. Delmar promising that he would not consent to part from me unless forced by the strong arm of the law. I besought him to tell me whether he really believed that the law could be thus used as a weapon against me: whereupon he said that, feeling he should be wrong if he lulled me into a false security, he must reply to the effect that should Mr. Lanover's statements be proved by documentary evidence, I must be given up to him. Then I asked, with renewed agitation, whether Mr. Delmar apprehended that the evidence would be forthcoming? He rejoined that it was impossible to conjecture.

"But," I exclaimed, vehemently, "do you believe, sir, that he is really my uncle? How is it that I was seized with so terrible a repugnance towards him?"

"Without touching upon this latter point," answered Mr. Delmar, "let us look at the whole proceeding calmly and seriously: for I repeat, it is better you should not be lulled into a false security. My candid opinion is that Mr. Lanover must be your uncle. The argument he used was a just one: —how could he possibly have become acquainted with all the antecedents of your life unless he were thus related to you? Besides, the story he told me of your birth, but which I need not repeat to you now, was consistent and plausible. It is true that Mrs. Jukes might have told him all that he himself had learnt from Mrs. Nelson, and which you one day overheard: but then comes the question—why should Mr. Lanover claim you if he be not your uncle? why should he seek to burthen himself with your maintenance? why should he have gone to all this trouble and expense to find you out?"

I was struck by the force of these observations—and my countenance fell.

"At the same time," continued Mr. Delmar, "I have my doubts whether Mr. Lanover will pursue the matter any farther, inasmuch as I have thrown such obstacles in his way. He must appeal to the tribunals; and the procedure will cost him a considerable sum. At all events, Joseph, keep up your spirits—do not give way to despondency—and rest assured that you will never want a friend so long as I remain alive. As for parting from you, I repeat my solemn assurance that I will only do so if actually compelled by the law."

"Yes—cheer up, Joseph," add-

ed Edith: "and perhaps all will yet be well."

I renewed the expression of my fervent gratitude for the kindness I had received: and then Mr. Delmar proposed that I should put off my livery and live upon a better footing beneath his roof: for he assured me that if Mr. Lanover's tale of my birth could be relied on as the truth, my parents had moved in a genteel sphere. But I would not listen to this generous offer: I was resolved not to be a positive burden to my kind benefactor; —and moreover, I represented that I could not assume the position of a gentleman until thoroughly convinced that I had been born to it, and that I should always have the means of maintaining it. Mr. Delmar consented to let me have my own way—at least for the present, until it should be ascertained whether Mr. Lanover purposed to take any farther proceedings, or not.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE INCIDENTS OF A NIGHT.

THE reader will remember that I described the porter, who occupied the lodge at the entrance of the grounds, as a stern-looking man, and that he had spoken very sharply indeed to me and Taddy on the morning that we presented ourselves at the gate in the form of mendicants: but I subsequently found, on better acquaintance with him, that he was by no means a bad sort of person. The neighbourhood was however so often visited by vagrants, and his master's generosity had been so frequently abused in the grossest manner to the porter's knowledge, that his temper was soured in respect to such applicants; and

he assured me that he had found it necessary to adopt the harshest demeanour towards those whom he judged to be undeserving of charity. He informed me that, at the very first glance, he had penetrated through Taddy's real character; and had concluded that he was accompanied by me in the hope of exciting a sympathy which he knew his own personal appearance would scarcely create. He further stated that it was he himself who had caused the notice against vagrants to be posted up at the entrance to the park,—inasmuch as when his back was turned and the gate happened to be unlocked, they would walk in; and after prowling about the grounds, would very likely self-appropriate whatsoever they could conveniently lay their hands upon. It farther appeared that about two years previously, a burglarious attempt had been made upon the Manor; and that one of the desperadoes being arrested, was recognised as having visited the premises, no doubt to *reconnoitre*, as a whining mendicant a day or two before. Then was it that the board warning vagrants off had been put up. It however seemed, from what I learnt, that it was much against the wishes of Mr. Delmar and Miss Edith that such a notice should have been reared upon the estate; and it was only in consequence of the earnest representations of the porter that it was allowed to remain.

The reader will not have forgotten that it was the porter's son who had lent me a suit of clothes, on my first entrance into Mr. Delmar's service, 'until my livery was in readiness. This lad, who was about my own age, was a steady, well-conducted, and intelligent youth; and I sometimes walked with him through the grounds. His father, whom I had

at first supposed to be so very stern and surly, took a great liking to me, and always, welcomed me into the lodge when I sought his son during a leisure hour. His wife was a kind woman, and exhibited the utmost sympathy on my behalf

After the scene which has been described in the preceding chapter, Mr. Delmar considerately bade me go and take a walk, so as to divert my mind from anxious reflection upon the painful incidents which had occurred. It was now six o'clock in the evening: Mr. Delmar and Miss Edith sat down to dinner; and I, profiting by the permission accorded, rambled out. My first thought was to wander by myself and give way to my reflections; but remembering it was for the precise purpose of avoiding mournful meditation that my services for the evening were dispensed with, I bent my way to the porter's lodge to seek the companionship of his son Arthur. The porter and his family were at tea; they made me sit down with them; and when the meal was over, Arthur and I strolled forth. The estate consisted of about two hundred acres; and as it was now the end of August, the golden harvests were yielding to the reapers' hands. It was a delicious evening,—a gentle breeze breathing over the fields, and giving freshness to the air after the sultry heat of the day. We extended our walk until nine o'clock: I had regained almost my wonted cheerfulness of spirits; and as I had scarcely eaten a mouthful at tea, I experienced a somewhat keen appetite. On our return to the porter's lodge, Arthur's mother insisted that I should enter and partake of supper with them—an invitation which I accepted. It was about a quarter to ten o'clock when I left the lodge and

began to hurry through the park towards the mansion, which was about a quarter of a mile distant.

The night had set in somewhat dark—the gentle breeze of the evening had strengthened into wind—and several black clouds were being borne quite fast over the deep purple sky. The servants' entrance was by a gate in a wall surrounding a courtyard at the back part of the house ; and this gate was always kept locked after dusk. As I approached it, by a narrow path diverging from the carriage drive, I was seized with a sudden alarm on beholding what appeared to me to be the forms of two men, moving rapidly away from the gate, and hurrying along the wall, disappear in the darkness. I stood still and listend : but I could catch no sound of footsteps nor of voices; and therefore I thought it might be imagination on my part. Nevertheless, I determined to inquire ; and when Edward answered the gate-bell, which I rang, I asked whether any person had called within the last few minutes. He replied in the negative; and I explained to him wherefore I made the inquiry. He said that the two men might possibly be labourers returning later than usual from their work ; and as there were two or three cottages situated about half a mile in the rear of the mansion—consequently in the same direction which those persons (if it were not my fancy) were pursuing—Frederick's explanation seemed probable enough. Therefore nothing more was said upon the subject ; and after remaining a few minutes in the servants' hall, I took a candle and ascended to my own chamber.

When I went to bed, it was some time before I could get to sleep. Naturally enough the incidents of the afternoon kept

forcing themselves upon my mind : I grew feverish and uneasy with restlessness—I looked forward with apprehension to any farther designs which might develop themselves on Mr. Lanover's part—and I dreaded lest by pushing matters to extremes he might compel Mr. Delmar to part with me. Gradually, however, my thoughts fell into confusion ; and sleep came upon my eyes. Then the objects of terror which had been uppermost in my mind while I was awake began to haunt me in my dreams. At first I fancied that Mr. Jukes, stern and implacable, was dragging me into the entrance way of the gloomy workhouse at Leicester ; and that the porter with the repulsive countenance was grinning in fiendish mockery at my ineffectual endeavours to escape from my persecutor's clutches. All of a sudden Mr. Jukes appeared to have changed into Mr. Lanover, who was dragging me along: but instead of the place being the Leicester workhouse, it was some dark and dreadful cavern, with a steep descent down which I was thus being forced. Nevertheless, methought that though the yawning abyss was dark as a sepulchre, and with unseen horrors lurking in its depths, it appeared as if the form of Mr. Lanover was distinctly visible ; and that instead of being apparelled in a new suit of black, his deformed shape was wrapped in the loathsome rags of beggary. I fancied, too, that his eyes—with their half-weasel, half-sanke-like expression—glared at me, penetratingly though cold; and that his apish mouth grinned horribly in mockery and scorn. Again the scene changed ; and I found myself, in imagination, accompanying Mr. Taddy through some of those vile dens and abhorrent scenes amidst which he had dragged me when

we distributed the circulars. Methought that he was walking behind, compelling me to go on in front through fear that I should run away from him; and that some spell which I could not shake off compelled me thus to remain subservient to his will. Horrors appeared to be deepening around me: the squalid shapes of poverty and nameless forms of vice, passing to and fro, assumed the aspect of hideous spectres and ghastly objects belonging to another world. I felt my blood stagnating and freezing into ice in my veins: my feet grew heavy as lead—I could not drag myself along any farther. I turned round to fix an imploring glance upon Mr. Taddy,—when all of a sudden I found it was the hideous-looking Lanover that had me in his power. Again he appeared to grin horribly: his form dilated into monstrous proportions, preserving, however, its distorted shape;—and as he stretched out his long baboon-like arms to fold me in his loathsome embrace, I awoke with a sudden start.

Was it indeed only a dream? My chamber was as dark as pitch; so that I could not satisfy myself by means of my eyes that I was really there: and such an awful consternation was upon me that I could not even stretch out my arms to grasp the curtains, to feel the texture, and thus convince myself that I was in my own bed. I lay motionless for upwards of a minute, while my thoughts settled themselves into a more composed state. The wind was blowing freshly; it appeared to moan round the building like human tones and lamentations of distress,—something rising into a sweeping blast, the sound of which to my fevered imagination appeared to bear the cry of murder upon it. I was not at all inclined to be superstitious: but I

felt alarmed—my mind had become attenuated by the hideous dreams through which I had been passing, and which I seemed to have the knowledge of having lasted for some hours. There was a sensation upon me as if a presentiment of evil were at work within me—as if, too, I had the intuitive consciousness of some dread deed of turpitude being accomplished. I recollect those two forms I had seen—or fancied to have seen—near the servants' entrance; and these shapes associated themselves with the forebodings which were in my mind. I felt that I should not be able to compose myself to sleep again for at least some time: I longed to get up, light a candle, and take a book to read: but so great was the nervous terror—vague and indefinite though it were—which was upon me that I dared not step forth from my bed. I really had the apprehension that I should fall into the arms of Lanover, or else, of some monster, if I did so. It was the first time in my life I had ever been under the influence of such an awful species of alarm; and vainly did I endeavour to reason myself out of it.

While I was lying in this condition, in this pitchy darkness of my chamber,—for the black night seemed to hang like a sable pall against the window facing the bed, so that the gloom which surrounded me was unbroken in its denseness—methought I heard the sound of a gate closing with some little degree of violence, just as if having escaped from the hand of some one going out or coming in, it was banged to by the wind. I felt assured also that it was the gate of the servants' entrance, and not any other within the enclosure walls. This circumstance gave renewed poignancy, to my terrors, but

turned them into another channel. I lost all sense of superstitious awe; and was smitten with the apprehension lest my foreboding with regard to real and positive wrong-doing should prove correct. That I *had* heard the sound of the gate I felt convinced; but then might it not have been accidentally left open? This was scarcely probable, as the servants of the establishment were steady in their habits and regular in the performance of their duties; and I knew that Edward the footman never retired to rest at night till he had seen the back premises thoroughly secured. I was more than half inclined to rise, seek his chamber, and tell him what I had heard: but I feared to disturb the household for nothing. Besides, I reasoned to myself that if any evil-disposed persons were about the premises, they would not prosecute their design after the occurrence of a sound so well calculated to attract the notice of any inmate who might not be asleep: while, on the other hand, if their design were already accomplished and the house was already plundered, it was too late to guard against it. I lay awake for two or three hours, in a condition of feverish nervousness,—despairing of being able to woo slumber again: but it nevertheless stole back upon me—and I slept till morning was considerably advanced. My usual habit was to rise at six o'clock: I was fond of being out early in the fresh air in the fine season of the year;—but on this occasion it was close on seven ere I opened my eyes. I thought, as I rose and dressed myself, of all that I had dreamt, imagined, and heard during the past night: and I had not finished my toilet when it struck me that considerable noise and confusion was going

on in the house, with persons rushing to and fro; then, all of a sudden, a piercing scream in a female voice rang through the mansion. I felt convinced that those rending accents of ineffable anguish came from the lips of Miss Edith: and I was smitten with the most awful misgiving. Footsteps were now heard rushing towards my chamber—the door burst open—and Edward, pale as death, and his features convulsed with horror, made his appearance, exclaiming, “Oh! Joseph, Joseph—our dear master —”

But he could not finish the sentence—and staggered back against the wall, as if about to faint.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed, more than half anticipating the dreadful truth: “What is it? Our dear master —”

“Murdered, Joseph—murdered! barbarously murdered!”

I sank back upon a chair as if annihilated. At first I could not even weep, nor give utterance to a word: I seemed petrified as to all vital power; and yet with a horrible sense of anguish burning within—just as if I were converted into marble, but yet preserving the faculties of mind with a frightful vividness. Edward, recovering himself, darted wildly away, scarcely knowing (as he subsequently said) what he was doing, but thinking that nevertheless there was something to be done. I know not how long I remained in that extraordinary state of physical numbness and mental keenness—nor how I got down-stairs to the storey below,—whether I walked slowly or rushed precipitately: but I found myself amidst a throng of horrified domestics on the landing whence Mr. Delmar's chamber and likewise that of Miss Edith opened. That shriek—that pierc-

ing, penetrating, rending shriek, which reached my ears—had thrilled from the lips of the poor young lady when the awful catastrophe burst upon her. But let me explain how the atrocious deed first became known.

It appeared that some of the servants, who were the first to descend that morning about half-past six o'clock, were surprised and alarmed at finding the shutter of the one of the lower back windows open, and two of the iron bars belonging to that window wrenched away. It was clear that a burglary had been effected. The butler's pantry was immediately flown to: the door was open, and whatsoever plate had been left there was carried off. The bulk of the plate, however, was invariably taken up-stairs at night, and only a sufficiency left out for the family use. A farther search showed how the burglarious murderers had effected their departure,—the gate at the servants' entrance having been burst open from the inside; so that the presumption was they had in the first instance scaled the wall to accomplish their entry, but had subsequently availed themselves of the easier method of the gate to issue forth when their work of plunder and assassination was completed. The servants who discovered these evidences, supposed that the crime had been limited to mere robbery; and Edward hastened upstairs to inform his master of what had taken place. He knocked at the door—but no answer was returned: he knocked again—and, still as no reply was given, some dreadful suspicion flashed to his mind amidst his already excited thoughts. For Mr. Delmar was habitually, an early riser; and even if he were sleeping later than usual on this particular morning, Edward had never before known him so difficult to

awaken. He accordingly entered the room,—when a ghastly spectacle burst upon his appalled and horrified view. His unfortunate master lay stretched in the bed, with his throat cut from ear to ear,—the sheets and the pillows saturated with blood. Rushing wildly from the room, Edward's looks indicated something dreadful of those who had followed him up to the landing; and before a word issued from his lips, the truth was suspected. In a few moments it was but too fully confirmed, as some of the servants made their way into the chamber, to which the horror-stricken Edward pointed with excited significancy. At that instant Miss Edith, hearing the noise and confusion on the landing, issued from her own room; and when the terrific tragedy burst upon her knowledge, the anguish of her soul thrilled forth in that rending shriek which I had heard and which had pierced my brain. She was borne back to her chamber in a state of hysterical frenzy: and the reader may imagine the amount of mingled confusion, horror, grief, and dismay which prevailed throughout the household.

When our feelings were somewhat composed,—or rather, when the first paroxysm of scarcely describable emotions had a little subsided,—the tragedy began to be spoken of in low shuddering whispers amongst the domestics. For some time however—at least an hour—I was so overwhelmed with grief and dismay at the barbarous murder of my kind benefactor, that I was incapable of deliberate reflection. My mind alternated between intervals of stupor and fits of inconsolable grief. At length, as I heard the servants conversing around me, I mentioned the circumstance of seeing the two persons near

the gate on the preceding evening--and likewise that of hearing in the night the sound of the gate closing. Edward corroborated the fact of my having mentioned to him the incident of the two men: but when I was now asked—and indeed earnestly pressed, to reflect well whether I could give anything like a definite description of those persons, I assured my fellow-servants that so far from being enabled to do so, I was not even certain at the time that it was aught more than imagination on my part.

Immediately after the discovery of the murder summonses were despatched for the nearest medical man to attend upon the bereaved Edith; and a messenger was likewise sent off to the Mulgravés in Grosvenor Square. The surgeon came; and on viewing the corpse of Mr. Delmar, he pronounced his opinion that death must have been instantaneous, so effectually was the murderous gash inflicted—and that the unfortunate gentleman had been dead some hours. In the course of the forenoon Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave arrived at the Manor; and the elder sister fell into a swoon the moment she entered the house of mourning. Instead, therefore, of being immediately enabled to minister unto the unhappy Edith, she herself required every attention. I learnt from Edward that Mr. Mulgrave appeared dreadfully shocked—and that when he repaired to the chamber where his deceased father-in-law lay, he buried his face in his handkerchief and sobbed audibly for some minutes.

The police, too, made their appearance at the Manor: and a second as well as more searching investigation of the premises was now instituted. It transpired that a bureau in Mr. Delmar's chamber had been broken open,

and the contents of a cash-box abstracted. From some information which Miss Edith was subsequently enabled to give at the coroner's inquest, it appeared that her father was in the habit of keeping two or three hundred pounds in this box; but what amount there might have been at the time it was broken open, the young lady could not say. The drawing-room had likewise been entered, and some valuable articles and nick-nacks carried off. The dining-room too had been visited: for the sideboard was broken open, doubtless (as the police suggested) in the hope of discovering the remainder of the plate. It was not however there,—the butler himself being in the habit of taking it up to his own chamber; and thither no attempt at an entry had been made. From this circumstance the police came to the conclusion that the burglary had not been effected with the knowledge or connivance of any one inside the house; as all the domestics knew that the great bulk of the plate was nightly taken charge of by the butler. Beyond the rooms above mentioned, no other part of the premises appeared to have been forcibly entered: but it was difficult to say whither the burglars had really penetrated, or to what extent their researches had been carried,—inasmuch as no traces of footmarks were discernible on any of the carpets or druggets—a circumstance to be explained by the very natural conjecture that the ruffians had taken off their boots or shoes on entering the dwelling. It should be added that the weapon with which the unfortunate gentleman was murdered could nowhere be found, and therefore must have been carried away by the assassins. The surgeon who examined the corpse, pronounced it to have been some

exceedingly sharp instrument—most probably a razor.

How that wretched day passed I scarcely know: for, as already stated, my own condition of mind was an alternation between paroxysms of frenzied anguish and long intervals of blank, dumb, dread consternation. I do not believe, however—as well as I can recollect—that I once devoted a thought to my own peculiar lot, or selfishly speculated on what would now happen to myself: all my ideas were concentrated in grief and horror at the tragic fate of my beloved benefactor. When night came, I slept through downright exhaustion and the prostration of all my energies both physical and mental; and when I awoke in the morning, it appeared as if I had passed through the phases of some hideous dream. In the forenoon the coroner's inquest was holden; and I was called in to be examined relative to the two men I had seen in the neighbourhood of the servants' gate. But I could tax my memory to no greater extent than I had already done when questioned by the domestics: nor as to the hour of the night when I had heard the sound of the gate closing, could I give any more definite response. All the time I was being examined, I was in a state of dull bewilderment; and when I issued forth from the room where the inquest was held, the scene was so dimly impressed upon my mind, that I only retained a confused idea of having stood before a number of persons seated round a table, with a few others in the background: but the whole appeared something which I had seen through a mist. Later in the day I learnt that the verdict of the jury was, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Several more days passed; my

mind began to regain a certain degree of composure—so that I was led to reflect upon my own position. The Mulgravés continued at the Manor,—every one now regarding the deceased son-in-law as the master. The circumstances of a terrific tragedy had thus thrown me, as it were, into the service of him who had wished to have me; but whether he would protect me against Mr. Lanover's claims, should any farther assertion of them be made, I could not possibly conjecture. Miss Delmar kept her own chamber; and her maids described her as being completely overwhelmed and crushed by the weight of the horrible calamity which had rendered her an orphan. Mrs. Mulgrave, after the first few hours of successive swoons, had mustered a degree of fortitude to which her poor sister appeared utterly unequal: and in due course she assumed the part of mistress of the Manor giving directions for the mourning of the female domestics,—while her husband did the same by the men-servants, and likewise superintended the arrangements for the funeral. As may be supposed, the atrocious deed excited a great sensation in the neighbourhood: a large reward was offered by Mr. Mulgrave for the discovery and apprehension of the assassins; and I understood that the police were indefatigable in their researches. But no clue could be obtained to the perpetrators of the foul crime.

Two days before the funeral took place, another visitor arrived at the Manor on the mournful occasion, and to be present at the last obsequies. This was the Rev. Henry Howard, a nephew of the late Mrs. Delmar, and consequently a cousin of the two sisters, Mrs. Mulgrave and Edith. He was a young gentleman of

about four and twenty, and had only just been ordained. I understood that on entering holy orders, he had obtained a small living in Devonshire; and the remoteness of his residence had therefore caused the delay in his arrival at the Manor. He was exceedingly handsome not above the middle height—slender and well made; and judging by his countenance, as well as by the affability of his bearing and the pleasing tones of his voice, he was of generous and amiable disposition. Three or four other distant relations of the family soon arrived at the house: but of these it is not necessary to enter into any personal description.

The funeral took place; and never shall I forget what a day of gloom it was for us all. When I beheld the coffin with its sable pall borne forth to the hearse, it seemed to me—not as if I were parting from the remains of a master whom I had only known for a few weeks—but from the best friend I had in the world, a benefactor who was my only defence against whatsoever adversities might threaten. The funeral was a sumptuous one; for so Mr. Mulgrave would have it: and thus, even where Death marshalled his array of sable-clad mourners, did that gentleman infuse the spirits of his own love of pomp, ostentation, and grand display into the solemnity of the scene.

But let me hasten and bring this chapter to a conclusion: for it is to terminate with an incident that constituted an important point in my destiny. On returning from the funeral, the members of the family gathered in the library to hear the will read,—all except poor Miss Edith, who was still confined to her own chamber by severe illness. The party had not been congregated many

minutes there—the hearse and the funeral coaches had scarcely taken their departure—when a hackney-coach rolled up to the front of the mansion. I was in my own room, sitting at the window in a mood of profound melancholy,—when the rumbling of that vehicle's wheels attracted my notice. I was instantly seized with a presentiment that this arrival regarded me. Nor was I deceived; the torturing suspense which I endured for a few minutes, was put an end to by the terrible realization of my worst fears. I was summoned down to the hall; and there I beheld Mr. Lanover pacing to and fro—his hands behind his back—his humped shoulder protruding, methought, even more than I had noticed on the former occasion—his shape appearing more hideously deformed—his countenance more malignantly ominous. Perhaps this exaggeration of the monstrous ugliness of the man was at the time mere fancy on my part,—arising from the utter loathing and the dire apprehension with which I regarded him: but such was the effect his presence produced upon me. At the same instant that I reached the hall by one means of communication, Mr. Mulgrave was descending the principal staircase; and looking around, he demanded somewhat angrily, “Who is it that wants me?”

“Have I the honour, sir, of speaking to the present master of this establishment?”—and as Mr. Lanover thus addressed Mr. Mulgrave, taking off his hat at the same time, he darted from beneath his shaggy overhanging brows a quick malignant glance at me as I stopped short at a little distance.

“I am Mr. Mulgrave,” responded this gentleman: “but whether I have a right to style myself

master of the mansion, I know not as yet. The will of my lamented father-in-law is only just now about to be read. If you, as I naturally presume, have any claim upon the estate—”

“No, sir—that is not my business here,” answered the humpback.

“Then pray, what do you want?” demanded Mr. Mulgrave, with an air of increased anger and astonishment. “I already thought it was sufficiently indecent of you to have me summoned away from a family meeting under such distressing circumstances; but now your conduct appears more indelicate still.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Lanover, with a humble demeanour: “but I really thought the funeral took place yesterday—”

“Have the goodness, sir, to explain your business,” exclaimed Mulgrave curtly.

“It relates, sir,” rejoined the humpback, “to this boy here, whom I claim as my nephew.”

“What boy?”—and Mr. Mulgrave swept his looks rapidly around. “Do you mean Joseph?”

“Him—and none other,” answered Lanover.

“Well—if he is your nephew, I suppose you wish to know whether he is to remain in service here? But no decision can be arrived at,” added Mr. Mulgrave, “until it is ascertained who has the right to assume the position of master or mistress.”

“You misunderstand me, sir,” replied Lanover, with another quick spiteful glance at me. “I mean to take that boy away with me, and provide for him in another and better fashion.”

“Ah! that alters the matter,” observed Mr. Mulgrave. “Of course you have a right to do what you like with your nephew: but in any case I would cheerfully take him into my own service. I

have told him so before—and I repeat the offer now.”

“And I accept it, sir—most gratefully do I accept it!” I exclaimed, now rushing forward in the suddenly excited hope of finding another protector in my deceased one’s son-in-law.

“No, sir—I beg to decline,” said Mr. Lanover, in a peremptory tone. “The boy must come with me. Let him strip off this livery —”

“Nay, he is doubtless welcome to the livery,” quickly rejoined Mr. Mulgrave: “for I believe, from what I heard, that when he first came to the Manor, it was in no very pleasant plight, poor lad, as to apparel. Well, Joseph, you see,” he added, turning his looks upon my countenance, “there is no help for it: you must go with your uncle; and here are a couple of sovereigns as a little present for you.”

“Joseph, sir, does not need your bounty,” said Mr. Lanover, assuming a haughty air, which contrasted ludicrously with his wretched shape: “for I would have you know that I am as much a gentleman as you are, and able to keep him as such.”

“At all events,” restored Mr. Mulgrave, “you need not treat me with this insolence. Under other circumstances I should resent it: but I am at present labouring under the impression of an incident of too painful a character.”

“For heaven’s sake, Mr. Mulgrave,” I exclaimed, a prey to the wildest anguish, do not abandon me—do not desert me—do not cast me off!”

“My poor boy,” he answered, with compassion in his accents, “what can I do? It is your uncle who claims you, I wish you well—but I am unable to assist you further.”

With these words he turned

away and ascended the stairs: while the horrible humpback, clutching me by the arm, dragged me out of the hall to the hackney-coach, which he forced me to enter. A scream rose up to my very lips: but remembering it was the house of death which I was thus quitting, I stifled that expression of my heartfelt anguish;—and without being permitted to bid farewell to any of my fellow-servants, was I borne rapidly away.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### ANNABEL.

I WAS now seated in the hackney-coach next to that man whom at the very first glance I had recoiled from with so deep a loathing, and whom I regarded in the light of a merciless persecutor. I burst into an agony of weeping as the vehicle rolled through the park; and so blinded was I with my tears, that I observed not, while passing the lodge at the entrance of the enclosure, whether the porter or any of his family saw me inside that coach. Mr. Lanover said not a word; and for a long time I thought not even of glancing up at his countenance. When the violence of my grief began to subside, and I longed to steal a look at his face—to ascertain if possible what treatment I was to expect at his hands—I dared not: I had not the courage. Oh! how could I ever regard that man as an uncle? how could I look upon him as a relative? If he were so, would not the voice of nature have cried up towards him from the depths of my heart, notwithstanding his ugliness?—should I have thus agonizingly shrunk in horror and aversion from his presence? But

on the other hand, how could I reasonably doubt that he was indeed nearly related to me? wherefore should he burthen himself with me if it were otherwise?

The vehicle proceeded in the direction of London; and already the northern suburbs were entered ere I could muster up sufficient courage to turn a furtive look upon Mr. Lanover. There did not appear to be anything spiteful in his countenance now. It was stern, cold, and implacable—but displayed no actual malignity. Still he said not a word: he met my look with his own chilling reptile-like gaze; and I withdrew my eyes,—shuddering from head to foot, and wondering what on earth was to be my destiny now.

To be brief, the coach rolled onward; and presently it stopped in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. The houses there are for the most part of a sufficiently respectable appearance: and it was at the door of one of these that the vehicle halted. Mr. Lanover curtly bade me alight; and the front door was opened by a female servant of middle age, with harsh features, and a sour crabbed look,—so that her very countenance appeared to furnish a continuation of the evil omens which attended every additional step of my acquaintance and connexion with Mr. Lanover. He conducted me into a parlour on the ground-floor, where a lady-like but very pale and sickly female, of about five-and-thirty, was seated.

“Here is Joseph,” he said, in his usual hoarse, disagreeable, jarring voice, which was not even now modulated to any tone of kindness, although it was his wife (as I subsequently learnt) whom he was thus addressing. “See that you keep a sharp eye

upon him—for he is a slippery young dog. I am going out on particular business, and will send round the tailor to measure him for proper cloths."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Lanover waited not for the meek reply which his wife gave in a voice rendered faint alike by indisposition and by terror of her husband: but he abruptly quitted the room. I was already prepossessed in favour of Mrs. Lanover: for her appearance was well calculated to inspire such confidence. Though pale and faded—pining away—and looking as if in a consumption—she retained the traces of a beauty of no common order: and there was something so mild and benevolent, so full of a pious resignation in the expression of her countenance, that even amidst my own griefs and troubles I could not help wondering, the very moment I beheld her, how it was such a being could possibly have any connexion with the hideous humpback. When we were alone, together, she took me by the hand—gazed upon me with an affectionate sympathy—and kissing my cheek, said, "You are as welcome here, Joseph, as it is possible for me to make you."

But as she thus spoke, she sighed—doubtless involuntarily: for though she would not distress me in the first few moments of my introduction to the house, she could not help feeling how powerless she herself was to do aught for me beyond what her husband willed.

She bade me sit down, and began to question me concerning the recent event at Delmar Manor: but when she preceived what pain it caused me to discourse on those topics, and how the tears gushed forth from my eyes when I spoke of the murdered Mr. Delmar and the charm-

ing, amiable, and warm-hearted Edith,—she hastened to turn to another subject. So she proceeded to interrogate me respecting my earlier reminiscences; and I was surprised to find how little she knew concerning my antecedents.

"Did you know my parents?" I ventured to inquire,

"No, my dear boy," she responded; 'I was never acquainted with any members of my husband's family.'

By this remark I found that it was indeed the humpback's wife whom I was conversing, and as I had of course surmised her to be. Again therefore did the wondering—I may almost say wildering thought, occur to me, how it was possible, that this interesting, lady-like, well-mannered woman could possibly have been led to link her fate with the most revolting lump of deformity that ever constituted a hideous caricature of the human shape. I think that by the manner in which I gazed upon her, she must have suspected what was passing in my mind; for the colour suddenly mantled upon her cheeks a moment before so devoid of vital hue—and a tear started forth upon the lashes of each mild blue eye. Light footsteps were at this instant heard descending the stairs: she hastily wiped away those crystal drops: and as the door opened she said, "Joseph, this is my daughter—your cousin Annabel."

I rose to greet the relative who was thus introduced: but I was suddenly stricken as it were with wondering amazement at the presence of a being who appeared to me nothing short of a bright and beautiful vision. Annabel was about my own age—namely, fifteen: just at that interesting period for one of her sex when beauty is in its first virginal

blossom. I had seen prints depicting the loveliest of females—in books I had read descriptions of feminine charms such as poets and novelists delight to give—but never aught in female shape which had thus been suggested to my mind, approached the ravishingly angelic creature that now stood before me. She seemed lovely beyond the possible loveliness of the romancist's happiest creation, or the poet's most worshipped ideal. Her countenance was one in which girlish simplicity was beginning to blend with a more thoughtful and serene expression; and over all there was a certain air of pensiveness—either the result of sorrows of her own experience, or else caught by reflection from a beloved mother's features. Nothing could exceed the softness of the large azure eyes; while myriads of ringlets of a golden hue waved around the exquisitely shaped head. Her forehead was high and open: the softly rounded chin completed the perfect oval of the face. Her complexion was of the purest white,—not the white which finds comparison with the cold and death-like paleness of Marble; but that clear living white whose colourless transparency constitutes its delicacy, and is relieved from an appearance of insipid sickliness by a healthful animation which rests upon it as the bloom upon the lily. The carnation wet with dew would afford but a poor simile for the vivid carmine and moist freshness of her classically cut lips; and when these parted, they disclosed teeth which, for want of a better similitude, we must liken to two rows of pearls. Then her shape,—it was chastely delicate in its taper slenderness, as that of a young girl of her age should be: but yet its fairy lightness and

symmetry denoted the incipient expansion of charms budding towards the contours of womanhood. Thus the gentle undulations of the bust were defined by the neatly-fitting dress; and nothing could exceed the admirable slope of her shoulders. She was tall for her age—upright as a dart—with a lithe willowy elasticity of figure properly belonging to girlhood, and yet fully consistent with mingled elegance and grace.

I could dwell throughout whole pages upon the lovely portrait of this sweet angelic creature as she first broke like a heavenly vision upon my view; and young though I was, I felt ravished—bewildered—amazed! Even then I experienced the etherealizing influence of Annabel's beauty. Around her appeared to hover as it were a halo of chastity: her presence exhaled the perfume of innocence: the spirit of girlish artlessness, female generosity, and all endearing qualities appeared to shine as it were through her. The innocence of her age, the ingenuous candour of her disposition, and the warmth of feeling of which her generous heart was susceptible, were all expressed in the limpid azure of those large eyes, which, swimming in their clear whites, were fringed with dark brown lashes. And these lashes, as well as the arching brows, formed an agreeable contrast with the golden hues of her lustrous and luxuriant hair. I must not omit to add that her head was as gracefully poised on the delicate, slender, and flexible neck as a tulip on its graceful stalk; or that her hands were small even to a fault, with the fingers long and tapering, and crowned by pellucid nails, almond-shaped and rose-tinted: while her feet and ankles afforded no excep-

tion to the exquisite symmetry of all her other proportions.

Let the reader pardon me if I have dwelt thus long upon this charming portraiture—the most charming amongst the many to be introduced in my singularly varied and eventful narrative. Perhaps I did not fully comprehend all the matchless perfections of this fairy creature during the first few minutes that I beheld her—nor even during the first few weeks of our acquaintance: perhaps I was too young and too inexperienced to have such impressions made upon me. But in after years has my memory travelled back—and even while writing now do my recollections thus retrace the vista of intervening time, and settle upon that precise day—that hour—those minutes, when Annabel and I first stood in each other's presence; and I know—I feel—I remember there arose within me the presentiment that this angelic creature was to exercise no ordinary influence over my future destiny.

I stood, I say, bewildered and amazed in the presence of that lovely vision. I was incredulous as to its reality: I could not bring myself to believe that it was otherwise than an angel-shape, permitted to appear to me, with its sweet countenance, in which girlish simplicity, high intelligence, and soft pensiveness were all blended with an irresistible power of fascination. I was awakened from my sort of half-dream by Mrs. Lanover speaking, as she said, "Annabel, this is your cousin Joseph, whom your father led you to expect."

"My cousin? Oh! how delightful to call this lovely girl by such an endearing name! She advanced towards me; and as a modest bashfulness tinged her cheeks with the delicate hue of the sea-shell pink, she extend-

ed her hand, which I at once clasped and pressed with a grateful fervour at being allowed to call her, 'cousin.' But scarcely had this introduction taken place, when the ill-favoured servant-woman entered to announce that a tailor had come to measure me. The man was shown into the room—his business was speedily despatched—he departed—and I was again alone with those two whom I was told to regard as my relations. Ah! now I was scarcely sorry to be compelled to look upon Mr. Lanover as my uncle,—since by so doing I had found such an aunt and such a cousin! He need not have told his wife that I was a "slippery fellow," by which he doubtless meant that I should endeavour to run away unless carefully looked after: for I had not been an hour in the society of his wife and daughter, ere I had learnt to love them thoroughly.

But again and again did I marvel to myself that such a man could be so closely connected with two beings as unlike himself as the fairest and serenest clime differs from the horrid region of hyperborean ire. I found that Annabel was, as her looks denoted, of the kindest disposition and most amiable character—without the slightest particle of affectation in her manners—and as thoroughly incapable of guile as an infant of being agitated by the stormy passions of grown up man. She was evidently much attached—indeed, devotedly so, to her mother, who, as I learnt in due course, was in a decline. But Annabel was ignorant of the real nature of her beloved parent's disease: she apprehended not that it must inevitably be soon closed in death. She only knew that Mrs. Lanover was very unwell—that she had long been ailing: but she hoped that

this cherished and adored mother would eventually be restored to health. She ministered to her parent in the most affectionate manner, showing her all those little thousand and one attentions which are so many evidences of real genuine love, and which conduce so materially to the solace of the invalid. The mother, too, adored Annabel. And well she might!—not merely because in her she possessed the loveliest of beings and the tenderest of daughters—but because circumstances had rendered their love so mutually indispensable. For here—before entering minuter details respecting my first experiences in Mr. Lanover's house—I may at once describe what I suspected from the first, but what I only had confirmed in the course of a few weeks. This was that the humpback was the most remorseless of tyrants,—sometimes giving way to outbursts of terrific passion—at other times deporting himself with a brutal sullenness for days together—and then allowing an interval of calm to ensue ere the exhibition of some other phase of his varied and diabolic temper.

But what was Mr. Lanover? of what profession? what avocation did he follow? whence did he derive his income? He had represented himself to Mr. Delmar as a gentleman living upon his means. He had a back room fitted up as an office, where he sometimes received visitors on business—where he often sat writing for hours together, and also where he shut himself up for whole days when in one of his sullen moods, appearing only in the parlour to take his meals. Sometimes, too, he was out a great deal both day and night—always “on business”—but what its nature was, he never said.

There appeared to be no lack of pecuniary means: he was evidently fond of good living, and the table was well supplied. The house was tolerably well furnished; and two female servants were kept. No luns knocked at the door: no creditor ever asked twice for his money; and Mr. Lanover did not stint his wife and daughter of any necessaries. But still he was a tyrant in his whole conduct: his will was a law from which there was no appeal: nothing could be done without his sanction;—and hence the evident misgivings which his wife had expressed on my arrival as to the amount of welcome I should experience beneath that roof.

But I must now return to the first day of my transference from Delmar Manor to Mr. Lanover's house. I sat conversing with my aunt and cousin—for so I was desired to call them—until four o'clock (it being about two when I arrived): and then the humpback came in to dinner. He spoke but little: and what he did say, was in a harsh cross manner to us all three. When the meal was over, he bade me follow him into the back room, which was called “the office:” and making me sit down opposite to him, he eyed me for some time with a sort of sardonic satisfaction, as if in malignant triumph at having got me into his clutches at last. But I was so pleased with the society of his wife and daughter, that I felt I could endure much on the part of Mr. Lanover.

“Well,” he said with a sort of inward chuckle, “and so you are beneath your uncle's roof in the long run. Don't you think you played the game of a most ungrateful scapegrace when I first offered to take charge of you? But let me tell you this—that if

you show any of your fine spirit here, I will take a leather strap and thrash it out of you, even though I cut your heart out at the same time."

There was something so diabolically horrible in these last words, that I shuddered visibly.

"Ah! I have touched you, have I?" exclaimed the humpback, with another and louder laugh, which jarred horribly upon my ears. "Take care you don't compel me to put my threat into execution. I know that you are—a scampish young fellow, fond of running away from people. But don't play that trick with me—or you will get the worst of it. You must never stir out of this house unless with my permission. I shall study your disposition well for a while: and then I shall see what I am to make of you: for of course you must look out for some profession or calling to earn your own bread in due time.

"I can assure you, Mr. Lanover—"

"Don't *Mr. Lanover* me!" he interjected with a fierce look. "Call me *uncle*."

"Well, uncle," I said, "I was going to observe that you may depend upon it I shall be only too delighted to have an opportunity of earning my own livelihood,"

"This is mere cant—humbug and nonsense!" he exclaimed, with a grin of ineffable scorn and disgust. "I am not the man to be deceived by fine speeches. However, the chief and the only thing I wanted to tell you was this:—that if you take it into your head to run away from me, as you did from Mr. Jukes—or if you play the truant for even a single day—I will make you repent it as long as you live. And mind! when I do have confidence enough to let you go out,

I will not have you renewing your acquaintance with those servants at Delmar Manor. You must not go near the place—at your peril will you do so! And what is more, if ever you happen to meet those Mulgravés, you will cross over to the other side, or pass them by, as if you never saw them before in your life. I will not have you cringing and humbling yourself by touching your hat as if you were still a page in menial service; and as they have only known you in *that* capacity, they will not recognise you in any other. Therefore, the best course is for you not to take any notice of them at all. Do you understand?—and what is more, do you mean to obey? Come, speak quick—and speak truly! Speak, I say, Joseph—speak!"

Mr. Lanover assumed such a fierce look, and appeared so very threatening as he fixed his half-weasel, half-snake-like eyes upon me, with a cold vibrating glare, that I felt frightened; and I readily promised to fulfil his injunctions in all things. There the interview ended; and I returned to his wife and daughter in the front parlour. They did not question me as to what Mr. Lanover had been saying—they doubtless feared to do so; and I did not tell them of my own accord.

A few days afterwards my new clothes came home; and Mr. Lanover, having bade me pack up the page's livery, ordered me to address it in my own handwriting to the *Hon. Angustus Mulgrave, Delmar Manor, Enfield Road, Middlesex*. He then sent the parcel by his servant to some carrier's office, to be delivered at its destination.

"You see," he said, "that I will not let you remain under the slightest obligation to those

Mulgraves; and this is the way to treat them. He told me not to have any of my insolence, did he?" and then the humpback chuckled in his harshest and most disagreeably jarring tones.

I had been a week inside the house without setting foot over the threshold, and only taking a little exercise in a small yard at the back. Mr. Lanover now told me that he thought I had got "sufficiently domesticated" to be trusted out a little; and he bade me accompany him for a walk. We issued forth together, proceeding towards the West End. He called at three or four houses of good appearance—desiring me on each occasion to wait for him in the Street, and not to go far away from the range of view commanded by the front windows, as he should have his eye upon me. For several consecutive days he pursued the same course towards me: and then, again observing that I was sufficiently obedient and tractable, he told me I might walk out for an hour or two by myself. Thus another week passed; and finding that I always came back, he again expressed his approval, and bade me take my cousin Annabel on a shopping expedition. This I gladly did; and from that day forth I enjoyed comparative liberty—Mr. Lanover appearing to feel that I had been put to a sufficient test, and that I had no inclination to run away. Nevertheless, he occasionally repeated his warnings against any endeavour of the kind—accompanying them with threats as diabolical as that which had so shocked and alarmed me on the first evening of my residence at his house.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SORROW AND STRIFE

ONE day—about six weeks after my introduction to Mr. Lanover's residence—Annabel and I were seated alone together in the parlour. Mrs. Lanover, being much indisposed, was confined to her own chamber; and as Annabel had been sitting with her for several hours, the kind and affectionate mother had desired her attentive daughter to descend to the parlour for at least a little while, so as to have a change of scene from the sick-room. Mr. Lanover was occupied in his office, which has been before described as the back room on the ground-floor, and therefore behind the parlour where Annabel and I were seated.

The young girl first of all took up her work: but I saw that she was in no mood to devote herself to it. She was unhappy—very unhappy, though she essayed as much as possible to conceal her feelings; and when I addressed her, she endeavoured to give smiling answers. But they were sickly smiles; and it was a sad, sad thing to behold such an expression come over the countenance of one so young, and so ingenuously, chastely, delicately beautiful. I conjectured but too well that she was sorrowing on her mother's account: I did not therefore like to allude to the subject; and the conversation dropped, until it ceased altogether. She bent that sweet face of hers over the work, which she however frequently laid down; and as I gazed upon her, I thought to myself that if I were rich and my own master, it would be the happiest moment of my life to place Annabel and her mother in complete independence of a man who was a brutal husband.

and a harsh, stern father. I remember that my young heart swelled almost to bursting, and the suffocating feelings came up into my very throat, as I contemplated that charming girl, and reflected that she was unhappy. Presently I beheld two large tears trickling slowly down her alabaster cheeks, and she appearing to be altogether unconscious that the emotions which were agitating in her soul were thus finding a vent. I could endure it no longer; but falling on my knees at her feet, I seized one of her hands; and while my own feelings burst forth in passionate sobs. "O Annabel—dear Annabel, do not weep! It goes to my very heart to see you thus unhappy!"

Never shall I forget the look of mingled astonishment, gratitude, and pure sisterly love which Lanover's daughter fixed upon me as I gazed up into her countenance. She did not immediately speak: her young bosom was swelling with ineffable emotions: and then the tears gushed forth from her eyes, tracing their pearly path over the cheeks to which her varied and excited emotions conjured up a gentle flush.

"Do not weep for me, Joseph," she said, perceiving that my tears were flowing also; and the tones of her fluid voice, though tremulous and broken, as well as soft and low, were clear as the sound of purest silver: "do not weep for me! No amount of sorrow can amend my position; and it distresses me to see that you are likewise unhappy."

"Unhzppy, Annabel!" I exclaimed: "how can I be otherwise when I see you weeping thus?"

"Sit down again, Joseph," she answered, suddenly wiping away her tears, and indicating the chair from which I had sunk upon my

knees: then, with a manner of most melancholy seriousness, and a singularly touching pathos in her tone and looks, she went on to say, "You see, Joseph, how ill my poor mother is: or perhaps you do not see it with the same amount of apprehension that I do. But she *is* ill—very ill; and I begin to think that there is something more in this long indisposition of hers than I had hitherto imagined. For three or four weeks past these misgivings have been gradually creeping into my mind; and now they haunt me like spectres. You know not, Joseph, how I love that dear mother of mine. She has ever been so good and affectionate towards me; and if anything should happen—"

But here Annabel stopped short; and her grief burst forth anew. Nevertheless she essayed to stifle and subdue it as much as possible,—while her sweet azure eyes were flung in trembling apprehension towards the door; and I understood but too well wherefore. She feared lest her sobs and the sounds of weeping should reach the ears of her father: for it was a great crime in his estimation to give way to an extreme of feeling of any kind. Indeed, I believe that whether Annabel's silver laugh had pealed merrily through the house—or whether her voice sent forth the bitterest lamentations—it would have been equally sure to arouse his ill-humour and provoke the coarsest upbraiding on his part.

"Annabel—dear Annabel, do not go on thus!" I said. "Your mother is not dangerously ill: she is weak and feeble—and a few days' repose in her own chamber will restore her to health."

Annabel shook her head mournfully; and again conquering her emotions, she said, in a

whispering voice, " You know, Joseph, that you only tell me this to cheer me ; but that you yourself think as I do in respect to my poor mother's illness. Oh ! for the last few weeks I have given way to reflections which seem to have opened my mind to the better comprehending of many things, and to the widening of my experiences. It is a dreadful thing for a daughter to be compelled to speak thus of a father," she went on to observe, in the lowest whisper, and with another trembling glance towards the door ; " but it is the truth—it is the truth ! his conduct is killing my poor mother by inches ! When we were poor—and we have been very, very poor, Joseph

—Oh ! we have known such poverty, I shudder when I look back upon it—my poor mother toiled all day, and half the night likewise, with her needle to support us. She was always ailing and sickly, ever since I can remember ; and that close application to her work injured her health more seriously still. Does she not, therefore, deserve kinder treatment ? Oh ! she has been a good wife and a good mother ; and should she be called hence, what will become of me, Joseph ? —what will become of me ?"

Poor Annabel literally wrung her hands as she thus spoke ; and it was shocking indeed to behold that fair young creature of fifteen thus speaking with the woe-experiences of a woman's mind—thus giving way likewise to an almost frenzied state of affliction. I said all I could to comfort and console her : I felt that I loved her dearly—*Oh !* so dearly, I would have caught her in my arms and strained her to my breast as if she were a sister.

"But I must not make you as unhappy as myself," she suddenly observed : and again exercising

the strongest power over her feelings, she grew calm. "Let us talk for a few minutes, Joseph, upon something else, before I go up-stairs to my dear mother again. When you have been walking out, have you never happened to meet any one whom you knew at Delmar Manor ?"—and I saw that she put the question, not with any particular motive, but merely for the purpose of giving the conversation a sudden turn.

"No—never," I answered.

"And will they not think," she continued, "that it is unkind on your part never to call and inquire after the health of the family ? Have you not told me how good Miss Edith was towards you—how both Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave experienced such sympathy in your behalf—and how all the domestics were so kind ?"

"It is all true, Annabel," I answered : " but I dare not do that which my heart prompts. I long to know how poor Miss Edith is—"

"And you dare not go thither and inquire ?" interrupted Annabel, gazing upon me in amazement. "Or is the distance—"

"Distance ? Oh no !" I exclaimed. "Were it ten times as great, I would cheerfully proceed on foot to testify my gratitude for the kindness I experienced at Delmar Manor :"—then lowering my voice to a cautious whisper, I added, "My uncle—your father—has forbidden me to go near that house, or even to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, should I happen to meet them."

Again did Annabel gaze upon me with amazement : but she saw by my look that I was indeed speaking nothing but the truth.

"Poor Miss Delmar !" she said, in a compassionating tone, touchingly soft and meltingly pathetic : "from all you have told me of that young lady, I feel deeply interested in her. Perhaps she

may not have survived the dreadful shock: but if she have, I sincerely wish her as much happiness as under circumstances she may possibly know in this world."

"So far as wealth can contribute to the fulfilment of your amiable wish," I answered, "she possesses that element of worldly felicity: for I happen to know that Mr. Delmar left his property in equal shares between his two daughters—"

At this moment the door opened with such abruptness—almost indeed with violence—that both Annabel and I started from our seats. Mr. Lanover entered the room; and the aspect of his countenance was but little calculated to tranquillize our alarms. I cannot describe the horrid look that he wore at the moment: his face was very pale—he seemed as if he himself had been frightened—or else that he was a prey to a convulsing rage, to which however he did not immediately give vent. He stood for a few moments gazing upon me with that dreadful look of his,—so that I shuddered and became cold to the innermost confines of my being.

"Go up to your mother!" he suddenly exclaimed in his harshest voice, and turning his diabolical look upon his angelic daughter: "go up to your mother, I say—and don't be gossiping here! Be off—quick—obey me!"—and the wretched humpback stamped his foot with rage.

Annabel had only paused to gather up her work: but her hands trembled so that she let it fall twice; and this trifling delay of a brief instant appeared to goad her unnatural father to very madness. She hurried out of the room; and Mr. Lanover banged the door violently behind her.

"And so you have been complaining—have you—to my

daughter, that I won't let you go to the Manor?"—and as he thus spoke he walked straight up to me with a reptile-glare vibrating in his deep-set eyes. "Now don't attempt to deny it: I overheard everything that has passed between Annabel and you. The minx—the hussy—the little wretch—she dared to talk of domestic matters and to upbraid me behind my back! But I will serve her out for it—that I will!" and the humpback's hideous countenance expressed a malignity truly fiend-like,

I shrank back so terrified that I felt as if he were about to murder me.

"Yes—I overheard all the whimpering, and crying, and the nonsense that has been going on," he continued. "But no matter. I shall know what to do. Killing her by inches indeed!"—and the humpback gave vent to that low, jarring, sardonically chuckling laugh which was so terrible to hear: but all of a sudden ceasing that hideous sound, and assuming a serious expression of countenance, he said in a milder manner, "What was it that you were telling Annabel at the moment I entered? How did you know anything about the way in which Mr. Delmar left his property? Not that it matters to me; but I don't choose you to go chattering about other people's concerns. Come—speak out—don't stand hesitating there! How did you know, I say, that Mr. Delmar made any such disposal of his property?"

"I do know, uncle," was my answer, "that the unfortunate gentleman made his will in favour of his two daughters equally."

"Well, but *how* did you know it?" demanded the humpback: "for I don't suppose that Mr. Delmar was likely to make a confidant of a boy like you—and

that boy his page too at the time!  
Come, speak out!"

I saw that a tempest of rage was on the point of bursting forth again: for the humpback had stamped his foot as he spoke;—and therefore, in order to avert the menaced storm, I candidly explained how I had been rendered an unwilling hearer of the conversation which took place between Mr. Delmar and Mr. Mulgrave when I was engaged in the museum. The humpback listened without interrupting me; and when I had done speaking, he appeared to reflect for a few moments; then he suddenly exclaimed, "And don't you think you were a pretty sneaking pitiful scoundrel to stay in that place and overhear a private conversation between your master and his son-in-law?"

"I have already explained to you, uncle," was my response, "how I become an unwilling listener."

"Stuff and nonsense!" he ejaculated fiercely. "But I won't have a nephew of mine confess that he was guilty of any such dirty paltry meanness. So take care how I catch you talking again upon the subject. Mind, I say!—never let anything in connexion with that dishonourable conduct of yours pass your lips any more—or by all the powers of Satan I'll cut the very heart out of you!"

The humpback shook his fist in my face as he thus spoke; and notwithstanding that he appeared a perfect monster of hideousness at the moment,—notwithstanding, too, that his countenance expressed all the darkest passions of the soul with such diabolic intensity as to be but too well calculated to make even a grown-up and strong man afraid,—I felt arising within me certain feelings which towards *him* I had

not experienced before. The spectacle of his lovely, amiable, ingenuous daughter's recent affliction, so closely followed by his brutal and unmanly severity towards her, was vividly uppermost in my mind; and now that he dared to shake his fist in my face—Oh! boy as I was, this aggregate of provocations suddenly aroused within me a certain spirit of rebellion. Perhaps he beheld something in my looks which made him suspect all this; perhaps he saw indignant glances flashing from my eyes. But certain it is that he stopped and surveyed me with a singular earnestness—indeed, a scrutinizing penetration for nearly a minute; and then, muttering something to himself, abruptly quitted the room.

It would appear that at this very moment Annabel was descending the stairs to procure something for her mother; and the humpback literally roared out, "Go up again—go up again, I say! No more of your sneaking tittle-tattle and your lies to Joseph!"

"Father, for heaven's sake do not address me thus," said the sweet voice of Annabel, in a tone earnestly deprecating and full of pathetic entreaty.

"Go up-stairs again, I say! go up-stairs!" he vociferated still more furiously.

"I am descending to the kitchen," answered Annabel, meekly, "to fetch something for my poor dear mother."

"By the powers of Satan, the girl defies me!" thundered forth the humpback; and his words were quickly followed by a blow.

"O father, father!" murmured Annabel: and then she burst into tears.

He had struck her!—the wretch had struck that saint-like girl! The blow not merely smote my

ears, but likewise my heart: the spirit of a tiger was excited within me—I rushed to the door—I tore it open—I sprang upon Lanover at the very instant he was about to deal his daughter another blow—I dashed him to the ground; I had the strength of a thousand at that instant.

Annabel threw herself between me and her infuriate sire, as he sprang up to his feet; and with passionate entreaties she besought me to be calm and him not to hurt me. The servants came rushing up the kitchen stairs; and Mrs. Lanover, having thrown on a morning wrapper, hurried down from her own chamber in wild affright.

"Go to your room, sir—go to your room, Joseph, this instant!" vociferated the almost maddened humpback; and his words were accompanied with a terrible imprecation.

"Yes, go—for heaven's sake go, Joseph!" whispered Annabel, with a look of the most imploring entreaty; and her words were echoed by Mrs. Lanover.

Reaction was already taking place in my own mind: I felt alarmed at what I had done,—and this was natural enough considering my tender age. But still there was too much of my aroused spirit remaining to suffer me to proffer a syllable in the form of apology; and in a sort of half-affrighted, half-sullen mood, I began to ascend the stairs. Mrs. Lanover, clinging in feebleness and terror to the railings, threw upon me a look full of tender compassion as I passed: it was evident that she could not be angry with me for what I had done, even though it was her own husband on whom I had inflicted personal chastisement. I glanced back, and beheld Annabel gazing after me in a similar manner. Every shade of sullen-

ness vanished from my soul; and I burst into tears at the thought that these two amiable beings should be subject to the tyranny of such a ruffian.

I ascended to my own bed-chamber; but not many moments had I been there when I heard Mr. Lanover's heavy footsteps tramping quickly up the staircase: and locking my door with a violence indicating the furious rage that filled his soul, he drew forth the key. But he spoke not a word. I listened at the door to hear whether he purposed to vent his brutal spite upon his wife or daughter: the spirit of rebellion was again strong within me—and I had the settled resolution of bursting open that door and flying to their assistance at the slightest sound which should seem to fulfil my apprehensions. But all continued silent for upwards of a minute; and then the violent banging of the front door of the house made me aware that Mr. Lanover had gone forth in a towering passion.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### FEMALE APPAREL.

IT was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I was thus consigned a prisoner to my own chamber. As for the captivity, I cared nothing about it: nor did I devote much thought in speculation as to what might possibly be the result of my rebellion against Mr. Lanover's tyranny. Hot feelings were agitating within me: I was in a glow of rage and indignation at the treatment which Annabel had received. Her image—so ravishingly ingenuous, so angelically candid—was before me: methought I beheld her charming azure eyes looking with

sweet melancholy into mine—I thought that her countenance, surrounded with its bright hyperion locks, was gazing in melting tenderness upon me. I felt—or at least I fancied that I loved her as if she were a very, very dear sister: I did not then understand that it was a love of another species which had already taken root in my young heart. And, Oh! to think that this being of such ethereal beauty—that this charming girl, endowed with all the ingenuous candour of fifteen should be subjected to the brutal tyranny of a despot father—there was something in the reflection that maddened me!

So active was my brain—such a whirl of thoughts kept pouring, eddying, and circling in it—that I noticed not how time went by. I was in a state of feverish excitement that I had never known before: I felt that there was something to be done—but what it was I knew not—and if I did had no power to execute it. It was most probably some desperate idea of liberating myself and carrying off Annabel and her mother: but my brain was too confused for calm deliberation or the adoption of a settled purpose.

Thus some time passed away; and then I heard a gentle tap at the door, and Annabel's sweet voice spake to me in consoling and encouraging words. I thanked her—I blessed her—I besought her not to endanger her own peace and comfort on my account. She told me that her father had gone out; and she whisperingly added that she must not stay long at my door, as the servants would be sure to mention the incident to their master if they happened to become aware of it. When she had gone, her sweet silvery tones appeared still to be echoing musically in my ears; it was a delicious harmony, as if angel voices

had been whispering to me from the spheres. Every now and then as often as she dared, did Annabel come back to my door; and when I heard her light feet approaching and the gentle tap of her fair fingers, my heart thrilled with a sense of delicious ecstasy. But hours passed on: evening came—and all this while Mr. Lanover remained absent. He had taken the key with him; and there were no means of conveying to me any refreshment.

"O Joseph! are you not very, very hungry?" inquired poor Annabel, in a trembling voice, at each of the visits which she paid to the door: but I assured her that even if I had food in the room, I should not touch a morsel—for that I had no appetite: and I spoke truly.

The dusk set in; and I heard the nearest church clock at length proclaim the hour of ten. Almost immediately afterwards Mr. Lanover's well-known imperious knock at the front door reverberated through the house. He was returning; and now I wondered for the first time during these many hours of my captivity, what could have kept him so long absent. It is true that he was sometimes away from home for an entire day, and even the whole night,—always, as stated in a previous chapter alleging business engagements: but it now occurred to me that his absence on this particular occasion had some especial reference to myself. Not that I however cared much: I was in that state of mind which almost defied the power of a new calamity to excite my feelings more painfully than they were already exasperated. I heard the front door close: then five minutes elapsed in silence; and at the expiration of that interval the sounds of Mr. Lanover's footsteps ascending the stairs reached

my ears. Those sounds ceased at my door : the key was introduced in the lock—and the humpback, with a candle in one hand and a plate in the other, made his appearance.

“Here is something for you to eat,” he said, in a voice sternly implacable: and now I noticed that he had a stout stick under his arm. “Yes,” he added, with a look of malignant significance: “I have thought fit to bring with me a ready means of dashing your brains out, you vile perverse boy, if you dare raise your hand against me once more.”

“A coward who would strike a poor girl—and that girl his own daughter,” I answered, my indignant spirit flaming up within me, “would not stop short at any ruffian deed.”

Mr. Lanover had already deposited the plate upon the table: quick as lightning his right hand, which was thus left free, grasped the stout stick—and I was felled to the floor; while a bitter imprecation, but low and deeply muttered on Lanover’s part, accompanied that savage act. I was not stunned—but for an instant I was almost stupefied. Then I thought he meant to murder me; and this dreadful idea, flashing to my mind, startled me into a wild terror. I was resolved to make a desperate struggle on behalf of my young life—and was about to precipitate myself on the brutal humpback, when he dealt me another blow which struck me down a second time. I was now thoroughly dismayed and cowed: my spirit was tamed down in a moment. Quickly as the dread of murder had flashed to my mind did the certainty spring up within me that he did *not* mean to take my life, but that he was only punishing me; and I felt the necessity of submission.

“Now,” he said, with a horrible

grin, “I suppose you have had enough of it. Take and eat this food I have brought you.”

“I do not want it,” was my answer, given half in sullenness half in affright.

“Very well—just as you choose,” he responded. “Take off your clothes and get to bed: it’s past ten o’clock.”

I obeyed: for I still smarted under the terrific blows which I had received; and I dreaded a repetition of them. I accordingly laid aside my apparel, and entered the couch. Mr. Lanover proceeded to gather up my clothes: he opened my drawers and took out another suit which I had: even my very boots did he thus possess himself of; and as he was quitting the room with the bundle, he said, “Now, you young rascal, you have no chance of escape. You see I am prepared for any of your tricks.”

The light of the candle flashing upon his countenance, showed that it was expressive of more than his usual malignity, blended with an air of fiendish triumph. He issued forth, locking the door behind him, and taking out the key. I was left again a captive, to the darkness of my chamber and the deep despondency of my thoughts. I could not go to sleep: I lay trembling with vague and undefined apprehensions. Mr. Lanover’s conduct had been so desperately resolute—so remorselessly brutal—that I felt persuaded there was no punishment his imagination could devise, short of murder, which his fiendish nature would not enable him to inflict. I heard the neighbouring church clock strike eleven; and a few minutes afterwards there was a knock at the front door. Then I heard Mr. Lanover’s voice in the ground-floor passage, bawling out these words:—You need not answer it: I

know who it is—some one for me. You can get up to bed, both of you: I will see all safe."

These words were evidently addressed to the two servants; and accordingly I heard them both ascend in a few minutes to the chamber which they occupied on the highest floor, and which was above my own. Then again, for a few minutes, all was silent in the house—save the light tread of footsteps overhead, as the women servants were retiring for the night. But now I heard the door of Annabel's room, which was on the same level as my own, gently open. I listened with suspended breath: for the idea struck me that the circumstance was to some extent connected with myself, from the simple fact that the proceeding was evidently conducted with stealthiness. I distinctly heard her fairy footsteps descend the first few stairs of the flight downward: light though these steps were, yet so keen were all my faculties at the moment that I could have heard a pin drop. But when those sounds were no longer audible, I lay wondering what it could all mean. I lay listening too: but half-an-hour elapsed without any farther token of what was going on. So strong however was the intuitive conviction that Annabel was up and about the house for some purpose in connexion with myself that I got out of bed and listened at the door. I had not been many minutes there, when I heard a door on the landing below open and shut gently,—the sound evidencing caution. I knew it to be the door of the chamber which Mrs. Lanover now occupied during her indisposition; and therefore I at once concluded that Annabel was up merely for the purpose of ministering to her mother, and that she crept about thus stealthily for fear of provoking some new

outburst of passion and some fresh ebullition of violence on the part of her father.

I went back to bed, and gradually sank off into a state not exactly of slumber where all consciousness is lost, but into a kind of dreamy repose where the intellect loses not entire command over its reflections. Thus I was still experiencing, as it were, a continuation of the same ideas as before; when I was aroused by hearing a key turning in the lock of my door. At the same instant the church clock began striking and I knew it must be midnight though I counted not the strokes—for some one was evidently entering my chamber. I was seized with a mortal terror: for the thought sprang up vividly in my mind that Lanover was coming to murder me. Such was the consternation which fell upon me that I had no power to move; and yet it appeared as if a scream had risen up to my very lips, but that I was not enabled to make the exertion necessary to give vent to it. The door opened and all in an instant my dismay was banished, as the whispering voice of Annabel said, "Joseph are you awake?"

"Yes," I replied, speaking in a similarly low tone: for I was struck by the conviction that the utmost caution was necessary in the present proceeding, whatsoever it were.

"Do not be frightened, Joseph," she went on to say, speaking in a low, rapid, and tremulous whisper and I had no difficulty in comprehending that she was striving hard to subdue her own agitation as well as she could. "Do not be frightened—and ask no questions but you must leave the house—You must fly, Joseph—you must fly!"

"Fly? good heavens!" I said in a paroxysm of terror: for

thousand unknown dangers appeared to be suddenly springing up around me.

"Hush! I implore you not to risk and ruin everything by any mad excitement:"—and these were strong terms for the mild and gentle Annabel to use,—smiting me therefore with the fearful importance of attending to her injunction.

"But whither am I to go?"

"Go, poor Joseph? Anywhere—so that you remain not here! For heaven's sake ask no questions! delay not!—Oh, I am myself half wild at the cause of all this! But you must fly—you must hasten away from London!—the greater the distance, the better. I have money for you—"

"But my clothes? Your father has taken them all."

"I know it—and I could not get them. Perhaps I risked my very life—O heavens, that I should say so!—to obtain the key. You must apparel yourself in female attire—There, Joseph, on this chair next to the door is everything you want. Get up and dress yourself: I dare not give you a light—and I shall remain outside the door until you are ready. I conjure you, delay not!"

Annabel then quitted the room and the door was closed behind her as noiselessly as possible. The reader may imagine far better than I can possibly describe the state of excitement into which I was thrown—an excitement which made me tremble all over with a nervous feeling, in which there was even something hysterical. I got out of bed, and felt for the apparel on the chair. All my limbs quivered: but I knew that some terrific danger must indeed menace me in order to urge the pure-minded Annabel to have recourse to the present proceeding. I therefore gathered all my fortitude to my aid, and began to do

my best to assume the female apparel which she had brought for the purpose. I will not enter into minute particulars on this point: suffice it to say that in about a quarter of an hour I was dressed in that raiment. It was her own that she had lent for the purpose; and considering the intricacies of such a toilet for one of the male sex, and that it was accomplished in the dark, I was surprised at my own expertness in mastering its difficulties in so short a space,

It was finished—and I gently opened the door. Annabel took me by the hand, and guided me to the stairs: for the passage was quite dark. Gently—indeed with aerial lightness—did we both descend. As we passed the door of her father's room, she pressed my hand with significance—it was indeed with the spasmodic energy of direst apprehension—to warn me that the slightest incautious sound, such as too heavy a tread—a creaking of a board—a false step—even a breath too deeply drawn, would betray us and ruin everything. But we passed on unheard: indeed, no spectress ever glided more lightly;—and the passage of the ground-floor was reached.

"Now, Joseph, you stand upon the threshold of safety—and heaven be thanked!" whispered Annabel, in a voice so low that three yards off it could not have been heard at all: yet so clear was her musical voice that I lost not a syllable. "Here is a purse—take it—my mother sends it to you, accompanied by her blessing. It contains not much—but sufficient to bear you to a great distance hence—and the greater the better! O Joseph, you can judge what my feelings are when I tell you that your life is menaced—and by my own father!"

Here Annabel was for a few moments so overpowered by her

feelings that she clung to my arm for support. I clasped her waist, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek: it was cold as marble!

"Now Joseph," she said, quickly recovering herself, "you must depart!"

"But you, Annabel—dearest Annabel?" I whisperingly answered: "to what perils am I leaving you exposed!"—and I was almost distracted at the thought.

"Be not uneasy, Joseph, on my account," she rejoined: "my life at least will not be menaced! Beware of my father—beware also of that man Taddy, who was here this evening. And now go!"

"No, no, Annabel—I cannot leave you thus!" I said: 'there is madness in the bare thought! Rather would I dare everything ——"

"Joseph, Joseph—I conjure you to depart! You know not what you are risking by this delay!"

"No, Annabel——"

"Joseph, if my father were to overhear us, he might in the first paroxysm of his rage—I shudder at the idea—you understand me—for my sake depart!"

"You will have it so, Annabel and I obey you. O God, that the time may come, dear girl, when we may meet again!"

"Yes, yes, Joseph—we shall meet again: for there is justice in heaven—and you will not always be persecuted thus. And now away!"

I caught her once more in my arms: we embraced fondly—fervently. She opened the front door in the most noiseless manner possible; and as the light of the street-lamp beamed upon her countenance, I saw that it was pale as death, and that in each eye there glistened a tear—those two tears resembling twin-drops of diamond dew. I would have seized her hand again—but she waved me away: the

door closed—and she was lost to my view.

I hastened along the deserted street of midnight, reckless of the way which I took. Indeed my thoughts were in too wild a state of bewilderment for me to deliberate what course I should adopt or which direction I should choose. I looked at myself, and found that I was appareled in a dark silk dress, with a shawl, a bonnet, gloves, and lady's shoes. Assuredly these last mentioned articles were not Annabel's: for the shoes that belonged to her delicate feet would not have fitted mine. I therefore concluded they were her mother's. However, not to dwell upon such details, suffice it to say that I was appareled as a young female: and there would have been something ludicrous in the adventure, were it not that this raiment had been assumed in order to save me from a murderous design. Ah! and I recollect the name of Taddy had been mentioned;—and that man was an acquaintance—nay, more, an accomplice of Lanover's! I had hoped that when I parted from him near three months back at the gate of Delmar Park, all connexion between him and me was severed for ever: but here I found his name suddenly blending itself in matters deeply and darkly concerning myself, and mysteriously associated with the progress of my destinies. What could it all mean?—why, I asked myself, should my own uncle (if such Lanover really were) seek my life? and wherefore should Taddy be likewise interested in taking it?

Such were my reflections as I hastened through the streets: but I was aroused from them by some ribald words which a half-tipsy rakish-looking gentleman addressed to me as seized my hand;

and breaking away from him, I rushed onward in vague affright. I found myself in Oxford Street. It was not quite so much deserted as Great Russell Street; several females were walking leisurely about—several rude and ill-mannered men also: several equipages, too, dashed by with their prancing steeds and their glaring lights. London was not yet asleep with all her Argus-eyes.

I continued my way, still in utter ignorance of what course I ought to adopt—but feeling impressed with the paramount importance of following Annabel's advice and getting out of the metropolis as quickly as possible. For a moment the idea struck me that I would hire a public vehicle, proceed to Delmar Manor, and beseech an asylum there; but then I reflected that this would be worse than absurd—it would be absolutely courting danger; inasmuch as the Manor was so close to London, and Mr. Lanover might possibly suspect that I had fled from his house in order to return amongst my former friends. So I went on, more and more bewildered how to act,—rejecting each scheme as soon as formed, and feeling the iron of utter friendlessness penetrating into my very soul. I was accosted by more rakish looking men, old as well as young: I fled from them with a feeling of horror which I did not however rightly understand at the time. There was a veil to my bonnet: and I drew it down.

I turned out of Oxford Street, and found myself in a very large square, the name of which I did not know; and I thought not of looking up to read it against the corner houses, although the lamps rendered the place light enough for the purpose. As I was proceeding onward, I suddenly found myself in the midst of a group

of insolent young men, one of whom caught hold of me: and with a cry of terror I broke away from him. They did not pursue me; but their boisterous laughter rang upon my ears until I reached the opposite side of the square;—and then, through sheer exhaustion, I began to slaken my pace, just as I reached a diverging street, at the corner of which stood a post-chaise with four horses.

But at that very instant methought I again heard those sounds of laughter coming from behind; and seized with apprehension of farther annoyance, I hastened towards a footman who was standing close by the door of the post-chaise, for the purpose of beseeching his protection. He immediately opened the door, and hurriedly motioned me to enter the vehicle. In my bewilderment, fright, and confusion, I instantaneously complied.—naturally thinking that he was good-naturedly putting me there for protection against the rude persons whom he might see advancing. The door was quickly closed—the footman sprang upon the box, exclaiming, “All right!”—and the post-chaise darted away at the utmost speed of the four horses attached to it.

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## CHAPTER X.

### AN ADVENTURE.

I was so astounded at this incident that I was for some minutes at a loss what to do; indeed, I felt as if it were all a dream. I threw up the veil which was over my countenance—looked from both windows to convince myself that I was really and positively awake—and then pressed my hands to my temples to

still the throbbing of my brain and settle my ideas. Yes—I was indeed broad awake! It was no dream; and I found myself seated alone inside that chaise, and being whirled along at a tremendous pace. It was but too evident that some egregious error had occurred, and that I had been taken for some one else; because it was impossible to conceive that this post-chaise and-four was waiting in readiness for *me*, or that Annabel's arrangements for my flight could have gone to this extent. I thrust my head from the window, and called to the footman, who was seated on the box. The rattle of the wheels and the trampling of horses created such a din that I could not hear what he said in reply: but I caught the words "All right," and "nothing to fear;" and I likewise perceived that he motioned vehemently with his hand, but at the same time in a perfectly respectful manner, for me to draw in my head from the window. Again I endeavoured to make him comprehend that some grand mistake must have occurred: again I caught the words "All right"—and then he urged the postillions to accelerate their speed.

I sank back in the vehicle in a strangely excited state of mind: and once more I began to suspect that, after all, the post-chaise might really have been intended for me. But if so, why had not Annabel mentioned it? Moreover, how could she possibly foresee that on leaving Great Russell Street my wandering steps would lead me in that precise direction where the equipage was waiting? No—it was out of all question; and therefore I was again speedily led to the conclusion that the whole adventure was connected with a mistake which could only be accounted for by the supposition that I was taken for some

one else. But now it occurred to me that after all it might prove a very fortunate incident. I was being borne rapidly out of the metropolis—that metropolis where dangers environed me, and where murderous intents might be tracking my footsteps. Wildly, and vividly and terribly came back to my mind those warnings which Annabel had uttered,—warnings against her own father and the villain Taddy,—and therefore, instead of being grieved at an occurrence which was thus wafting me away from the scene of such frightful perils, I began to rejoice and to thank heaven for having so mysteriously and wonderfully saved me therefrom. As the sense of increasing security thus grew within me, I thought that it would be nothing less than downright madness to make another attempt to stop the chaise and give explanations to the footman. No—I would suffer the equipage to carry me as far as it might; for I reasoned to myself that whosoever I should meet at the end of the journey, could not possibly be regarded as more formidable than the vile hump-back and the detested Taddy. So I remained quiet inside the vehicle, and fell into a train of reflection in which Annabel's image was uppermost; and as I reviewed all that had taken place on this memorable night, I felt that the gratitude of an entire existence was due to that amiable and beauteous creature.

The streets of London were now left behind—the chaise was dashing along a road bordered with villa residences—these dwellings soon became more and more straggling—until at length they yielded altogether to hedges and trees. We were now therefore out in the open country; and the fresh breeze of morning—for it was considerably past one

o'clock—fanned my feverish cheeks. A sense of weariness came over me—an irresistible desire to compose myself to slumber; and beginning to feel that the air was somewhat sharp and cold, but yet not choosing to exclude it altogether by drawing up the windows, I merely put down the veil and folded the shawl more closely around me. I was sinking off to sleep when the equipage turned abruptly out of the main road, with such a sweep into a bye-lane that I was startled with the apprehension it was about to upset. So great was the terror thus suddenly caused, that I was aroused into complete wakefulness again; and glancing first from one window—then from the other—I perceived a high hedge on either side; so that the equipage was embowered as it were in the verdure which darkened the view. Along this shady lane it proceeded for about ten minutes—when it entered another main road, and stopped in front of a spacious mansion standing about a hundred yards back, and with an intervening shrubbery. Of all the numerous windows, lights appeared to be burning in only three on the ground floor; and as the equipage came to a sudden halt, I likewise observed two gentlemen standing at the iron-gate which was set in the boundary wall, and which stood open. Now, I thought to myself, the mistake would be discovered; and what if, after all I should experience some very rough treatment in the paroxyam of rage which disappointment would be so well calculated to excite on the part of these individuals? What, too, if the female whom they were no doubt expecting, and for whom I had been taken, were to be made the object of some dreadful crime—even murder?—and that this doom might be inflicted upon me

before it was discovered that I was *not* the right person? I was suddenly petrified with horror—stricken with consternation—as these reflections swept rapidly through my brain. The door of the chaise was quickly opened by one of the two gentlemen; and there was light enough to show me that he was young and handsome.

"You must alight here," he said, in a tone which indicated the resoluteness of a sternly settled purpose: at the same time he reached forward his arm to aid me in descending from the vehicle.

I obeyed mechanically. I strove to speak, if it were but a single word, to clear up the mistake: but I could not. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth: my faculties were paralyzed with consternation. I descended: the two gentlemen took my arms—and hurried me through the shrubbery into the mansion. Another footman was standing on the threshold of the front door: and the instant we entered, he closed it. I was now in a large and handsome marble hall—still sustained between the two gentlemen, one of whom I have already noticed as young and handsome; the other was an elderly person, some five or six years on the shady side of fifty. Here I stopped suddenly short: the faculty of speech appeared to be returning—and I was about to say something, when the elder of the two gentlemen, whose sallow and wrinkled countenance denoted a stern and rigid decision of purpose, said curtly, "Not a word! You must submit."

The blood froze in my veins; all kinds of horrors sprang up like ghastly spectres before me: I was smitten with the conviction that murder was intended—and I the victim! A side-door opened; and

I was hurried into a sumptuously furnished dining-room where a clergyman in canonicals and an elderly lady were seated. This elderly lady was exceedingly pale; and I instantaneously read upon her countenance that same air of stern decision which I had already noticed upon the features of the two gentlemen. Wax-lights were burning upon a table in the centre of the room: but they only lighted it dimly—and the remote corners of that spacious apartment were enveloped in obscurity.

"Can this be Alicia?" quickly cried the lady, as if seized with a suspicion of something wrong.

"Pardon me—forgive me—for God's sake, do me no harm!" I cried, my tongue now completely unlocked; and I sank down upon my knees in the midst of that group of four by whom I was surrounded.

"Perdition!" ejaculated the younger of the two gentlemen. "Whom have we here?" and the veil was snatched up from my face with such sudden violence that the very bonnet was torn off my head.

"Treachery!" was the instantaneous ejaculation on the part of the elderly gentleman and lady—while the young gentleman stood stupefied with amazement; and the clergyman dropped from his hand a book which he had been holding.

"It is a boy!" cried the elderly gentleman.

"What does it all mean?" asked the lady: and indescribable was the confusion which prevailed.

"It was not my fault! it was a mistake—an error!" I cried. "I was told to enter the carriage—"

"Little fool!" thundered forth the elderly gentleman: "what mischief have you done!"—and in a sudden paroxysm of rage, he

levelled a terrific blow at my head with his clenched fist: but the lady caught him by the arm, and held it back just in time to save me from receiving its full force.

"For heaven's sake, Ravenshill, do nothing rash!" she exclaimed. "Let us hear his story."

"Yes, my lord—pray be composed," said the clergyman.

"Composed!" echoed Lord Ravenshill,—for such appeared to be his title and name: "how can I be composed when all our plans—"

"Hush, father," interposed the younger gentleman; who now appeared to have recovered his self-possession: "let us take my mother's advice and hear this boy's story. Get up, sir," he said, sternly addressing me, as I still knelt in the midst of this excited group; "and explain what has occurred. But be careful how you deceive us: for you no doubt have sufficient insight into this matter to be aware that it is most serious. Come—speak frankly. Everything depends on the account you render of yourself."

"I repeat," was my answer, tremblingly given, "that I am innocent of any wilful intention to produce mischief."

"Your name? who are you?" demanded Lord Ravenshill imperiously.

"Joseph Wilmot," was the response quickly elicited by terror. "I implore—"

"But who are you?" again demanded the nobleman, stamping his foot with enraged impatience; "how came you in this female garb? By heaven!" he added, turning to his wife and son, "I do believe he is in some trick—and that he was dressed up for the express purpose of personating—"

"Hush, father! mention no names!" quickly interposed the son.

"But the height and figure—the shape—the appearance when the veil is down,—all are the same!" said the bewildered nobleman. "It cannot be an accident—a coincidence! it must have been intentional!"

"Do let the boy explain," said Lady Ravenshille.

"Yes—that is the best course," suggested the clergyman. "I do not think he is a party to any trickery: he looks too frightened. Let us hear what he says. Come—speak, my lad; and do not be afraid. You have nothing to fear if you tell the truth."

While this hurried colloquy was going on, certain rapid reflections swept through my mind. I felt that it would be most unkind—most ungrateful, indeed, towards Annabel and her mother, to expose Mr. Lanover's iniquity: for her sake I was bound to spare him. I knew not to what extent I might entangle him with the law, if I were to give a complete explanation of his diabolic intentions towards me. Frightened therefore though I was, I nevertheless resolved to dare any amount of savage vengeance that might be inflicted by those with whom I now found myself, rather than reveal matters which, by affecting Lanover, might produce consequences to redound heavily upon the heads of Annabel and her mother.

"If your lordship," I said, addressing Ravenshille, "will listen to me for a few instants, I will explain as much as I can or may."

"By heaven!" ejaculated the young gentleman, "the explanation shall be most complete and satisfactory—or it will be the worse for you!"

"Hush, Walter," said Lady Ravenshille, in a deprecating manner to her son: "we must let the boy speak."

"I solemnly declare," I went

on to observe, "that what I have already told you is true. Ask the domestic who was in attendance on the chaise, whether he did not at once compel me to enter when I accosted him."

"Ah! you accosted him?" ejaculated Lord Ravenshille. "But wherefore?"—and he eyed me with keenest suspicion.

"Some rude persons were in pursuit of me," was my response; "and I flew to that servant for protection. This is the real truth: the man himself can corroborate my statement when he comes to reflect on the mode in which the mistake originated. But what is more," I went on to say, suddenly recollecting something, "I looked out of the window to inform him of the error and bid him stop: but he assured me that it was all right—he would scarcely listen to me—the chaise rolled on like the wind—"

"Well," observed the clergyman, "the boy speaks frankly and openly enough; and his looks corroborate his sincerity. It is clearly a mistake, my lord."

"And an accursed one too!" was the nobleman's deeply muttered response. "But this female garb?"

"Relative thereto," I answered, "I can give your lordship no further explanation than this:—that I was at a place where it became of paramount necessity to fly—But I conjure you not to imagine that I did anything wrong! On my soul, I did not! It was no fault of mine: some one had certain reasons for wishing me ill—I can mention no names—I can enter into no details of facts: there are mysterious circumstances connected with me which I myself do not rightly understand."

"I really believe the boy," remarked the clergyman aside to

the others: but I nevertheless caught the words he thus spoke.

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed: "as there is a God above us, I am telling you the truth!"

"Well, but what have you been? what is your station in life?" demanded Lord Revenshille. "Tell us something more concerning yourself, that we may know what to do with you:"—and then he muttered aside to his wife, "It would never do to turn the boy adrift and let him tell the tale of this adventure to whomsoever he might meet."

"No—assuredly not!" responded her ladyship. "Come, boy—answer his lordship's questions. What have you been?"

"A page in a gentleman's service," I at once replied, not choosing to make any further reference to my sojourning with the Lanovers.

"A page—eh?" cried Mr. Walter. "And I presume you are in search of another situation? Well," he continued, as I gave an affirmative response, "we shall see what is to be done for you. Here—come along with me."

Thus speaking he took up a wax-candle; and I followed him from the room. No one was now in the hall: he led the way up a magnificent staircase to an ante-chamber communicating with a larger sleeping-room, and between which, as I afterwards found, there were double doors; so that the first and smaller chamber was fitted for the occupation of a page or valet in attendance upon any one using the larger apartment.

"Now, boy," said Mr. Walter, "you can sleep here to-night—or rather for as much of the night as there is remaining; and we shall see in due time what is to be done with you. Put a seal upon your lips in respect to the adventure which has brought you

hither; or it will be the worse for you. Mind what I say. There is something in your looks which I rather like; and I am inclined to trust you. By the way, you shall have other and more suitable clothing in readiness by the time you will want to get up."

With these words the young gentleman deposited the wax-candle on a table and quitted the room, locking the door behind him. I made haste to put off my female apparel and get to bed. But exhausted though I was alike with fatigue and hunger, I could not compose myself to sleep. The adventures of this night were of so startling a character—they had hurried me along with such a wild excitement—they had succeeded each other with such fabulous rapidity—that they were sufficient to work the brain into a fever. More than an hour passed ere I could even settle my thoughts so far as to woo the approach of slumber; and just as I was beginning to doze I heard the key turning in the lock. The door opened and Mr. Walter made his appearance. He stopped for an instant by the bed as he passed: but I did not open my eyes; and he continued his way into the adjacent apartment—not however again locking the door which communicated with the landing; he doubtless reflected that I could have no inducement nor inclination for stealthily running away while the household slept. Perhaps, too, he thought that I was asleep; and in a few minutes I was really wrapped in slumber.

I did not awake until a late hour; and then I perceived by my bedside a complete suit of page's livery,—which, when I rose and dressed myself, fitted me almost as well as if it had been originally made for me. Scarcely had I finished my toilet

let, when the Hon. Walter Ravenshill—for such I found were his proper distinctions—made his appearance, he being already up and dressed. He surveyed me with some attention for nearly a minute—not so much, methought, to observe how the livery fitted as to penetrate deeply into any character and disposition through the medium of my countenance. I also had now an opportunity of observing him more at my leisure than during the excitement which followed my first arrival at the mansion. He was not above the middle height, but slender and well made—remarkably handsome—with an aristocratic profile, a short upper lip curling haughtily, and an oval configuration of countenance. He had dark brown hair, whiskers of a still deeper hue, and well-arched brows. His eyes were of a deep hazel—but not with the softness that usually is associated with orbs of this colour: the fire of strong passions shone in those eyes. He was apparently about five-and-twenty years of age, and I should observe that he had a slightly dissipated air, but not sufficiently marked to render him sickly nor to impair his good looks.

"I have been thinking," he said after having completed his scrutinizing survey of my countenance, "about all that has taken place—I mean in respect to yourself. You see, Joseph, you have dropped down amongst us as if from the clouds, and under such peculiar circumstances that we don't like to turn you adrift. There is evidently some mystery attached to you: but we will not seek to penetrate your secret, if you promise to keep ours."

"I can assure you, sir," was my answer, "I have neither any

motive nor desire to betray what took place last night. Indeed, as you may suppose from what little explanation I was able to give, I am at present friendless in the wide world."

"Well, it is not my intention," resumed Mr. Ravenshill, "to ask you any more questions. It happens that a few days back one of my father's pages left us suddenly: he was precisely of your height and make—and I see that his apparel fits you well enough. If you choose to take his place, you can do so."

"May I inquire, sir," I asked, "in what neighbourhood this house is situated?"

"At no great distance from Richmond," was the answer.

I had studied the map of London and its environs sufficiently to be aware in what direction the neighbourhood just mentioned lay: but still did Annabel's urgent warning suggest the prudence, of placing a far greater distance than this between myself and the metropolis. I therefore said, "Pardon me, sir, for venturing to question you, and also for appearing to hesitate: but I have enemies in London—For heaven's sake do not eye me suspiciously! I take God to witness that I have never committed a deed of which I am ashamed."

"Do not be afraid—I believe you," replied Mr. Ravenshill; "And if you are afraid of being too near London, you may at once banish that apprehension from your mind: because under present circumstances"—and he spoke with a sudden access of bitterness—"the family will leave Ravenshill for the seat in Devonshire this very day."

He saw my countenance brightening up; and taking it for granted that I now considered myself installed in the place

which he offered, he told me that I might seek my fellow domestics in the servants' hall as soon as I chose. He then quitted the room; but I remained behind for a few minutes to reflect upon the altered position of my affairs. And now I bethought myself of that purse which Annabel had placed in my hands on the preceding night, and which I had not as yet looked into. I drew it forth—not for the selfish purpose of seeing how much it contained, but because the idea had struck me that amongst its contents there might possibly be some written injunctions in addition to those which she had given verbally. There were ten sovereigns in the purse, and a small scrap of paper. This I hastily opened; and read the following lines:—

“ When the excitement of your hurried departure, dear Joseph, shall be over, you will naturally reflect upon the circumstances attending it. You may even fall into the society of those who will become interested in you (for that you must make friends for yourself, I am sure); and they may perhaps press you for detailed explanations. I beseech you to spare my father! I need say no more. The generosity of your heart is duly comprehended and appreciated both by my afflicted mother and by

“ Your affectionate but unhappy  
“ ANNABEL.”

I shed tears over this billet; and at first vowed that I would keep it as a memorial of its beloved writer: but a second thought induced me to destroy it—for I was afraid lest in the progress of some fresh vicissitudes it might fall into the hands of others. Poor Annabel! I wept bitterly as I reflected that if her father enter-

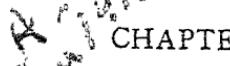
tained the suspicion of her complicity in my flight, he would visit it with the most savage vengeance. I upbraided myself for having been persuaded thus to escape: I fancied that I had acted a cowardly part in consenting to a course which, while it ensured my own safety, would possibly compromise her. Oh, how I longed to be with her again! Never had she seemed so dear to me—that beautiful ethereal creature—as now that we were separated. But should I ever see her more? Yes! I remembered her own words—that there was justice in heaven, and that I should not for ever be pursued by my persecutors. The silver notes of her voice seemed to linger in my ear, and that assurance appeared fraught with the inspiration of prophecy. Ah! and even then, too—young though I was—I solemnly vowed within the depths of my own heart, that Annabel's image should serve as my good genius; and that if ever I were assailed by temptation to stray into the wrong course, the memory of that image should keep me back in the right one. I vowed to devote my existence to Annabel; but that the offering should be worthy of her to whom it was made, I felt that this life of mine must be kept pure and uncontaminated;—for that Annabel herself would continue ever the same in virtuous principle,—no matter how the lapse of long, long years might dim the radiance of her charms, and alter her personal appearance,—I had not a doubt. That morning, as I thus sat reflecting in the chamber where I had slept, I invoked heaven's choicest blessings on thy head, thou angelic and charming Annabel!

Before I descended to the servants' hall, I looked forth from the window, and beheld an

immense garden and pleasure-grounds at the back of the house, with paddocks and orchards adjoining,—and beyond, an undulating sweep of verdant meadows, where flocks and herds were pasturing. It appeared to be a beautiful spot—as the mansion itself, according to what little I had already seen of it, was spacious and handsome. I looked in the glass to see whether my eyes denoted that I had been weeping; I bathed them again—and then, satisfied that all traces of my tears were wiped away, I descended the immense staircase; and encountering the very identical footman who had brought me in the carriage, was conducted by him towards the servants' hall. But suddenly he stopped short; and clutching me by the arm, said with a half-smile and a sly look, "Of course, my lad, you will not talk about that little business of last night. It is only known to three or four of us, and need not go any farther."

I readily promised to comply with the man's injunction—as indeed it only enjoined the very course which I myself should have adopted of my own accord. He spoke civilly and kindly enough; and I was thus well pleased to observe that he bore me no rancour on account of the error into which he had been led through me during the past night. I found that the domestic establishment of the Ravenshill family was an extensive one:—but the servants were now in the hurry and bustle of preparations for the family's departure. When breakfast was over, I was informed that the travelling carriages would soon be in readiness, and that I was wanted by the Hon. Walter Ravenshill to pack up such portions of his own wardrobe as he purposed to take. To be brief, at about eleven o'clock, two equi-

pages started from Ravenshill—one containing his lordship, her ladyship, and Mr. Walter—the other two valets, two lady's maids, and myself.



## CHAPTER XI.

### CHARLTON HALL.

IN one of the most delightful parts of Devonshire—about twenty miles to the south of Exeter—was situated an old manorial residence, bearing the denomination of Charlton Hall. This was one of the country seats belonging to the Ravenshill family; and it stood in the midst of a vast estate, through which a stream meandered on its crystal way. This property had been in the family for several centuries: from time to time portions of the mansion had been rebuilt—but on each occasion retaining some part of the older structure; and thus the entire edifice combined several varieties of architecture, but without any ridiculous contrasts. The interior presented an old-fashioned aspect imperceptibly blending with the arrangements and improvements devised by notions of modern luxury and comfort. Thus the immense staircase up which a regiment of soldiers might have defiled, was embellished with fine statues and enormous vases: the spacious drawing-rooms were sumptuously furnished, but yet in a style to correspond with the elaborate carvings of the cornices, the huge projecting mantel-pieces, and the arched windows. The bed-chambers were so extensive and in some the windows were so small, that they would have had a gloomy aspect,—were it not that they were furnished in a light and cheerful manner. Alto-

gether, the sombre grandeur and massive adornments of bygone ages were so relieved by the appliances of modern taste, and were brought to blend so imperceptibly with the artificial elegances of the present time, that the impression created by the interior of Charlton Hall was by no means a melancholy one.

The immense park was intersected from the entrance-lodge to the front of the Hall, by a well-gravelled carriage-drive, bordered by rows of superb beech-trees; thus forming a charming avenue of at least three-quarters of a mile in length. Being perfectly straight, and gradually widening from the lodge towards the Hall, it afforded an imposing and gradually developing view of the immense mansion, to any one thus approaching the manorial residence for the first time. Clearly and brightly flowed the stream, at a distance of about a quarter of mile on the right hand of the park: there seemed to be life in its crystal waters and spirit in its continuous rapidity, as it hurried on to join the river whereto unto it was a tributary. On the alluvial borders of this stream and of that river, were situated the finest and richest meadows of the vast estate; and there countless flocks were grazing, and numerous herds of the red cattle of Devonshire browsed upon the emerald pasturage. On the left hand side of the park there was an assemblage of trees having the appearance of a perfect forest: but on a near approach, the rich fruitage gemming the boughs, and the regularity with which the trees were planted, enabled the observer to distinguish a well cared-for orchard from a wildly growing wood. The lands, seen from the windows at the back of the mansion, presented a rolling landscape of unparal-

leled beauty,—a succession of hills and valleys extending far as the eye could reach, until closed by some loftier heights in the horizon. The sides of the hills were clothed with verdant coppices, adding to the beauty of the valleys; and when the entire scene was bathed in the mellow light of the autumnal sun, it was a delicious picture over which the eye could wander without ever tiring.

Lord and Lady Ravenshills had but one son—the Hon. Mr. Walter; and this was the only issue of their marriage. The household establishment at Charlton Hall was an extensive one, and was continuously maintained on the the same footing, inasmuch as the family were wont to pass at least seven or eight months out of every year on this estate. There was a fine stud of horses, and four or five carriage equipages. Indeed, my first impressions in respect to the Ravenshills family were that they must be possessed of almost illimitable wealth. I had fancied that Mr. Delmar's establishment was a very fine one: but it was literally insignificant in comparison with the extent of that into the midst of which circumstances had so singularly thrown me. The utmost profusion crowned the tables in the servants' hall; and every day we banqueted upon luxuries. Nevertheless, I had not been long installed in my new situation, before my mind gradually began to open to the conviction that there was a certain under-current of discontent amongst the domestics,—sometimes expressed by gloomy and disappointed looks—sometimes in whisperings amongst three or four together—and at other times in louder grumblings; but the nature of which I did not at first comprehend.

I must now observe that on the verge of the estate, about two miles from the mansion, there was situated a beautiful picturesque little village, taking its name from the domain, and therefore called Charlton. From the back windows the ivy-covered tower of the ancient church could be distinguished above the trees; and through an opening in that embowering grove a quaint old-fashioned dark-red brick house, forming the parsonage, might be discovered. The stream flowed through this village, and turned a water-mill in the immediate vicinage. The nearest town was about three miles from the Hall; and it appeared that the Ravenshill family were accustomed on the Sunday to visit one of the churches in this town, and not that in the village of Charlton. I afterwards discovered that this was because the clergyman of the village—having for the most part a humble congregation, chiefly consisting of rustics—felt himself bound to adapt his discourse to their powers of comprehension; and as a simple sermon did not suit the high and lofty notions of the Ravenshill family, they had for a long time frequented the tower church, where there was a very eloquent and fashionable preacher. Perhaps, also, Lord and Lady Ravenshill puffed up as they were with aristocratic pride, were better pleased to display their grand equipages before the townspeople than in the eyes of the rustic villagers; and moreover, her ladyship's superb toilet would have been altogether thrown away upon the latter—while it was certain to make a due impression upon the former. And then, too, on coming out of church, there was the meeting with other nobility and gentry having country seats in the neighbourhood, and likewise

frequenting that fashionable church. As for the domestics, they also had their pew at the same town church; and a sort of light and elegant omnibus van conveyed thither on the Sabbath those whose turn it was to go to church. For in this respect her ladyship was exceedingly particular—no doubt that the number of her domestics thus regularly attending should likewise make its impression upon the townspeople, and enhance the pomp, ostentation, and ceremony which characterized all the proceedings of the Ravenshill family.

Immediately after our arrival at Charlton, a round of gaieties commenced at the Hall. There were dinner-parties three times a week, on which occasions numerous carriages from all the adjacent country seats rolled up to the dwelling. There were, moreover, generally a dozen visitors staying at the house; and I used to think that the Ravenshill family maintained a sort of regal magnificence. On fine days, shooting parties, fishing parties, and riding parties were formed: but if the weather were inclement, all kinds of amusements and recreations were devised for indoors. The gentlemen lounged in the billiard-room—private theatricals were got up—and at night the festivities were maintained till a very late hour—sometimes till the morning was far advanced. At first I wondered how the entertainers and the entertained could stand so much dissipation and gaiety: but my experiences during my career of servitude have shown me that the effects of those pursuits soon make themselves apparent in the pale and haggard looks of the male sex in high life, and in the prematurely fading beauty amongst the ladies: so that there is no wonder if succedaneous

arts and cosmetics should be so profusely had recourse to, in order to conceal the ravages committed by heated rooms, late hours, luxurious feeding, and the incessant recurrence of exciting and wasting pleasures.

The Hon. Mr. Walter's principal valet was a man about thirty years of age—good-looking—and of very smart appearance. He was always genteelly dressed in black, and was scrupulously neat in his person. I became a favourite with the domestics generally: but this man, whose name was Charles Linton, took a particular fancy to me, and treated me with considerable kindness. Sometimes when we had a leisure hour, he would invite me to ramble out with him; and as he himself had received a tolerably good education, his discourse was something above ordinary commonplace style. I should observe that he was one of the valets who had accompanied the family down from Ravenshill House near Richmond: and therefore he was aware of the sudden manner in which I had been introduced into his lordship's service. But hitherto he had never spoken to me on the subject—though from two or three words which he had occasionally let drop, it was apparent that he was not altogether unacquainted with the mysterious incidents of that memorable night. I should likewise add that he was one of the few servants on whose part I had not noticed any of those whisperings and grumblings, and that air of discontent, which I had perceived in respect to the great majority. Though thoroughly good-natured, he was indeed somewhat reserved; and was in the habit of speaking more to me than to any other of his fellow-domestics.

One afternoon, when we had

been about a month at the Hall, we were strolling together along the bank of the stream. There was a pause in the conversation which had hitherto been going on; and the silence was presently broken by Charles observing, with a somewhat significant look, "Your wages were due to-day—weren't they, Joseph?"

"Yes," I answered: "but I had quite forgotten all about it. I suppose I must apply to the steward—"

"I am very much afraid," interrupted Charles. "that it will be precisely the same as if you had continued to forget it:"—then seeing that I gazed upon him with astonishment, he went on to observe, "The fact is, Joseph, things appear to be coming to a crisis with the family. I see you don't understand me. Now, I am not in the habit of talking of his lordship's affairs, because it's no business of mine; and I must say that if our wages were regularly paid, the place would be a comfortable one enough. But the truth is, Joseph, that for the last three years there is scarcely a single soul of us that has received above one quarter of our due; and for four months past not a shilling has been paid."

"I thought his lordship was immensely rich," was my very natural observation: and my amazement was not altogether unmixed with incredulity—though I knew that Charles Linton was by no means likely to jest upon such a subject.

"Rich indeed!" he exclaimed: "his lordship ought to be rolling in riches. Look at this splendid estate—look at the pretty little property at Richmond—and then, too, there's a fine house, sumptuously furnished, in London: but everything is mortgaged over and over again. You don't exactly understand what I mean. The

fact is, his lordship's father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather were all very extravagant, and borrowed large sums of money ; so that when the present lord came into the property, he had nominally a revenue of forty thousand a year, but in reality not ten. He married her ladyship with the idea that she was possessed of excellent prospects, and at the death of an old uncle would have something like two hundred thousand pounds, which would go very far towards relieving the estates from their encumbrances. But Mr. Cuthbert, the old uncle, suddenly married again : two children were born—a boy and a girl—and all the property at the old man's death was of course left to them. Lady Ravenshill therefore got nothing. The boy died a short time ago—that is to say, about two or three years ; and his surviving sister, Alicia Cuthbert—”

“Alicia !” I ejaculated, instantaneously struck by the name, it being the one mentioned by Lady Ravenshill on that night of mystery and adventure with the post-chaise-and-four.

“I know why you look astonished,” observed Charles: “you are aware that it was Miss Cuthbert who was to be carried off that night when you were so strangely taken for her ? She lives with her mother in Hanover Square, leading out of Oxford Street ; and it was at the corner of one of the streets nearest to Mrs. Cuthbert's house, that the post-chaise was waiting. Of course you now begin to have a greater insight into the matter than you had before. Alicia Cuthbert came of age a few weeks ago,—inheriting two hundred thousand pounds and upwards. She is a beautiful creature, delicately and slightly made; and therefore it is easy to imagine how you were mistaken for her.

But you must not think that she wishes to espouse Mr. Walter: she hates and detests her cousin ; and Mrs. Cuthbert has an equal abhorrence for the Ravenshill family. I believe that Miss Cuthbert is in love with some young gentleman of very slender resources ; and against this match her mother sets her face. I do not exactly know what were the details of the stratagem to carry Miss Alicia off : but it is not very difficult to suspect that she was made to believe Captain Berkeley—for that is the name of the young gentleman alluded to—was waiting to elope with her. However, whatever the trick was, it failed, as you perceive; and bitter no doubt is the disappointment of Mr. Walter and his parents. They thought to get hold of the two hundred thousand pounds, which would have helped to clear away their embarrassments ; and how it will all end, I can't say—but I have my fears ; and I think from certain appearances, that a crisis is at hand. I would have you know, Joseph, that Mr. Walter threw out several hints at the time that he should like me to manage the business of carrying off Miss Cuthbert : but I affected not to comprehend them—for I can assure you that even if the demand had been pointedly put, I should have refused to have anything to do with the proceeding.”

Every word which fell from Charles Linton's lips was a revelation for me: the mystery that eventful night was now fully cleared up; and certainly the transaction did not display the character of the Ravenshill family in a very favourable light.

“But how is it,” I inquired, “that such gaiety prevails at the Hall, when his lordship's circumstances are thus embarrassed ?”

"For several reasons," responded Linton. "In the first place, the family has been brought up to certain habits which it cannot possibly shake off: they can no more get out of their extravagant ways than an inveterate drunkard can all in a moment become a water-drinker. In the second place, they doubtless flatter themselves that by keeping up these appearances, they conceal their real position from the knowledge of the world generally;—and in the third place, it is absolutely necessary for Mr. Walter to drop up the falling fortunes of his house by means of some brilliant alliance, which he can only hope to form by keeping his position in society. I am however afraid that though the nobility and gentry of these parts are ready enough to accept invitations to the Hall, eat his lordship's venison, drink his champagne, and encourage him in all his profuse hospitality—if hospitality it can be called—they will not be found so eager to bestow one of their daughters on the ruined Walter Ravenshille."

"But will not Mr. Walter have the property," I asked, "at his father's death? I thought I understood that the estates were what is called *entailed*."

"So they are," replied Linton: "and Mr. Walter will enter upon their nominal possession, the same as his father did before him: but from all I have learnt, I do not think that he will have a single farthing of revenue. The fact is, the moment he came of age he joined his lordship in a number of securities, and bonds, and fresh mortgages, and so forth: and in different ways he has pledged beforehand, as it were, all his own life-interest in the property. There never was such a cruel thing, between you and me, Joseph, than this con-

duct on the part of his lordship. Not contented with ruining himself, he ruins his son. I do believe that Mr. Walter naturally possessed some good qualities: but he has been spoilt—totally spoilt by the mode of his bringing up. I speak to you in confidence, because you are a discreet and intelligent lad: and I don't mind talking to you. Indeed, I feel as if this vent for my thoughts does me good. There are times when I really pity Mr. Walter; and when I see all that is going on, I wish that I was on terms sufficient to warrant me in giving him some little advice. But great folks look down upon us servants, and imagine that we care nothing at all for their interests as long as we are well dressed and well fed."

"Then you think, Charles," I said inquiringly, "that Mr. Walter is looking out for a wife amongst all these beautiful and dashing ladies who are staying or visiting at the Hall?"

"I don't think anything about it—I am sure of it," was Linton's reply; "and I am equally confident as to the result. It will be a failure, Joseph; mark my words, it will be a failure—and there will be a terrific smash soon: for how all the Christmas bills are to be met at the beginning of next year, is more than any one can say; and the towns-people are already refusing to give any father credit. This is a positive fact, Joseph; and I know that the steward and butler purpose to have a serious conversation with his lordship this afternoon."

I was much shocked to hear that such was the condition of his lordship's affairs: for there was something painful in the idea that the possessor of such a vast estate should be so impoverished in his actual resources.

"It is very hard upon some of

us servants," continued Linton, after another pause. We work hard—and we have a right to expect regular payment; although I for one certainly have never greedily pressed for it. But the worst of it is that I really do believe my lord and her ladyship give themselves greater airs the nearer the hour of their utter ruin approaches. One would think, by the way they go on, they had not the slightest difficulty in paying their debts; but would you believe, Joseph, that her ladyship has actually borrowed money of her maids, and yet does not seem to think she is under the slightest obligation to them? By the bye," added Charles, suddenly turning the conversation, "we are extending our walk a little too far: in another quarter of an hour we should be in Charlton. Come, let us turn."

We began to retrace our way accordingly: and as we bent our steps homeward, Linton said. "Talking of Charlton, I don't think you have been there yet—have you?"

I answered in the negative, "It is a beautiful little village," he went on to say; "and even now, though the trees are well-nigh all stripped of their leaves, it has a picturesque appearance. I tell you what, Joseph,—you and I will walk over to church there on Sunday, if you like; and I can promise that you will hear a discourse a great deal more touching than the high-flown bombast of Mr. Prunella at the town-church. The village parson has just come back: I understand he has been away for some months in consequence of a death in the family. I can assure you that he is much beloved by his parishioners. My lord and her ladyship don't like him because he is of retired habits and unassuming manners: he is not one of your champagne-

drinking, sporting, gay and dissipated clergymen like Prunella —But, Ah! whose carriage is that rolling along the road yonder? I'll be bound it's going to the Hall. More visitors! more guests!"

We continued our way back to the mansion,—on nearing which, Charles strictly enjoined me not to mention anything he had been saying to me: But I assured him that no such caution was requisite. A new and splendidly painted equipage, drawn by two gorgeously caparisoned horses, and accompanied by servants in liveries not merely fine but outrageously gaudy, was standing in front of the Hall; and Charles, catching me by the arm ere we parted to attend to our respective duties, hastily whispered in my ear, "It's old Boustead's carriage; and I can guess what it means. I will tell you all about it presently."

Half an hour afterwards, as I was speaking to one of the servants in the Hall, Lord and Lady Ravenshille descended the staircase in company with a short, stout, vulgar-looking man, about sixty years of age, who talked very loud—exhibited great pomposity of manner—and seemed to have an extraordinary idea of his own importance. He had an immense red face and a very short neck; so that he looked exceedingly apoplectic. His gold watch chain, depending from his fob, was of immense size, and was garnished with at least half-a dozen seals. There was altogether an air of pretension about him which indicated the *parvenu*, or upstart; and though in one sense he was obsequious—filling his sentences with "my lord" and "your ladyship" to a nauseating extent—yet on the other hand he evidently strove to place himself on a most familiar foot.

ing with them. As he talked very loud it was altogether impossible to avoid hearing what he was saying; and I could not help noticing that he spoke uncommonly bad grammar, and appeared to have a wonderful ignorance of the proper use and meaning of certain words. Lord and Lady Ravenshill were treating him with a very marked courtesy,—which, though evidently forced, was nevertheless replete with that well-bred refinement which prevented its object from perceiving that it was thus constrained.

Behind this group Mr. Ravenshill was escorting a young lady who leant upon his arm, and whom I presently understood to be Mr. Boustead's daughter, delighting in the euphonious name of Euphemia. She was very far from being good-looking: and truth compels me to add that she was exceedingly ugly. Her hair was of a flaming red; and, as if determined to throw out its brightness with the utmost effect, the young lady wore a bright yellow bonnet. Her countenance was insignificant, notwithstanding a certain air of pretension, which she doubtless borrowed from her father. Her forehead was one mass of brown freckles; she had the most ignoble pug-nose that ever formed an integral part of a feminine profile; and it was so small that it might literally be said to be of Nature's "chiselling,"—for if Nature had chiselled much longer, there would have been no nose at all. But as if to indemnify her for this deficiency of one feature, that same Nature had presented her with a pair of very large coarse lips; and when these parted in a smirking smile they revealed teeth which, though certainly white enough, had the longitude of tusks; and the two front ones were so far apart that a half-crown might have been plac-

ed between them. In figure she was excessively thin, even to leanness: she had a short mincing step—and her form bent forward as it were with a sort of swaying movement, which was very ungraceful. There were both pretension and affectation in her whole appearance. Her toilet was outrageously gaudy and flaunting; and she was so bedizened with jewellery that it seemed as if she had studied every possible means of stowing about her person as many ornaments as possible. These, instead of imparting brilliancy to her aspect, could not fail to strike the most ordinary beholder as being in the very worst possible taste.

"Well, my lud," said Mr. Boustead, speaking in his loud, strong voice, and with his pompous manner, "we shall have the honour of cutting our mutton with your ludship and my lady tomorrow at half-past six. Phemy dear," he added turning round to his daughter, "don't forget his ludship's kind provoke. By the bye, my lud, we give our grand *let-off* next Monday; and Mrs. B. will be quite unconsolate if you and her ladyship and the Hon. Mr. Walter won't accept an invite."

"I can assure you, Mr. Boustead," answered Lady Ravenshill "that it will afford us infinite pleasure."

"Don't make it later than nine," resumed this gentleman: "for there's going to be a polytechnic display—"

"Pyrotechnic, pa!" suggested Miss Boustead, correctively.

"Well, my dear," responded her affectionate parent, "I dare say you know best: leastways you had ought to do so—for you cost me enough for your edification. But I don't begrudge it. One mustn't be equinoctial in these things, my lud."

"Economical, pa!" again suggested the amiable Euphemia.

In pleasant and agreeable discourse of this sort the party descended the stairs, traversed the hall, and proceeded forth to the carriage. Methought that Mr. Walter looked anything but happy, and that the smiles which he wore upon his countenance were altogether forced, as he handed the gaudily dressed Euphemia into the vehicle.

"Now pray, my lud, don't stand out here with your hat off," said the considerate Mr. Boustead: "the influential"—by which I suppose he meant the influenza—"is very much about. And you, my lady, will get a touch of rheumatiz."

Lord and Lady Ravenshill bowed their acknowledgments of this kind advice: Mr. Walter also bowed—and the equipage rolled away.

"Well, Joseph," said Charles Linton to me when we had an opportunity of speaking a few words together in the evening, "do you understand what all that meant this afternoon?"

"I think I do," was my response. "Mr. Ravenshill is going to marry Miss Boustead."

"That is to say, if everything goes on smooth," observed Charles. "I rather wondered that these Bousteads should have been invited to the last two or three evening parties: but now it's as clear as daylight."

"And pray who is Mr. Boustead?" I inquired.

"What he was in his earlier days no one knows," returned Linton. "He does not appear to have made much sensation in the world before he kept a very small, but no doubt very respectable chandler's shop, about a quarter of a century back. The chandler's shop gradually expanded into a large grocery and tea-dealing

establishment; and then, by some very lucky speculation—a sort of neck-or-nothing affair—Mr. Boustead gained fifty thousand pounds. The tea-dealing establishment was sold! and he went on speculating in this thing and in that, till at last he retired from business altogether, about four or five years ago, with at least half a million. You see what sort of a man he is: his wife is three times as vulgar. But they have got the money—his lordship wants it—and therefore I have no doubt," added Linton, lowering his voice to a significant whisper, "our young master will be sacrificed."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BOUSTEADS.

ON the following Sunday, according to agreement, Charles Linton and I walked across together to the little village of Charlton. It did not contain more than about sixty houses,—most of these being cottages of the humblest description, tenant-ed by rustics who were chiefly employed upon Lord Ravenshill's estate. The church stood at the farther extremity: and the parsonage, as already stated, was close by. We arrived in good time, and took our seats in the gallery. Presently two ladies in deep mourning entered the pew nearest to the reading-desk, and which I therefore knew to be the clergyman's. From where I sat I could not immediately obtain a view of those ladies' countenances; but I saw that one was evidently by her figure an elderly person—while the other was quite young.

A few minutes afterwards the clergyman ascended into the

reading desk ; and what was my astonishment on immediately recognising the Rev. Mr. Howard, a relation of the Delmars, and whom I had seen at the Manor on the occasion of the funeral. Then I recollect being informed at the time that he had a small living in Devonshire: but it so happened that though I had now been upwards of a month at Charlton Hall, the name of this village clergyman was never once mentioned in my presence—or if it were, I had failed to be struck by it. I now surveyed those two ladies with renewed attention. The circumstance that they occupied the minister's pew, and they were in deep mourning, convinced me they were his relations. Perhaps the younger one was his wife?—for I had not heard, when at Delmar Manor, whether he was married or not. I did not like to put any whispering questions to Charles Linton, as the service had just commenced. It progressed; and throughout the reading of the prayers I had not the slightest opportunity of catching a glimpse of the countenances of those ladies. They were evidently much affected by several parts of the service wherever allusions were made to *death*. It was not until the Rev. Mr. Howard was ascending into the pulpit that my curiosity was gratified; and then, as the younger lady raised her eyes, I at once recognised the beautiful features of Miss Delmar. Yes: it was indeed Edith—but pale—Oh! so pale, that I saw at once how much she must have suffered and how ill she had been. Almost immediately afterwards I was enabled to notice that her companion was, as I had suspected, an elderly lady; and her countenance, though much care-worn, and bearing the traces of deep mental distress, was full of benevolence

and kindness. Throughout the service Edith never once glanced up towards the gallery; and when it was over, she and her elderly companion remained seated in the pew while the congregation issued forth.

I did not mention to Charles Linton that I had recognised any one who was previously known to me. I had never spoken of the Delmars by name to any inmate of the household at the Hall: I was too fearful of saying a word that by any accident might serve to afford a clue to the discovery of my whereabouts on the part of Mr. Lanover. But as I and Linton walked back to the Hall, he noticed that I was pensive—and kindly inquired the reason. I gave some evasive response, with which he was satisfied—or at least appeared to be so. When I went to bed that night, I reflected whether I should avail myself of the first opportunity to walk over to Charlton again and pay my respects to Miss Delmar: for I knew perfectly well that if I explained to her that that there were certain reasons inducing me to wish my place of abode to remain strictly a secret, she would be the last person in the world to betray it. But then I reflected that she had doubtless come down into this seclusion in the heart of Devonshire, not merely for the restoration of her shattered health—but likewise to escape as much as possible from those associations and scenes in the vicinage of London which must be so painful for her; and I thought that my presence, so forcibly reminding her one of the noblest as well as the last acts of true benevolence ever performed by her deceased father, would revive all the bitterness of her affliction. I therefore resolved to allow at least some time to elapse ere I would take any step that should

so vividly recall the past to that young lady's mind. My pillow was moistened with tears this night, as the terrific tragedy at Delmar Manor was reviewed over again in all its diabolic and mysterious details.

On the following day, Mr. Boustead's splendid equipage arrived at Charlton Hall, at a quarter to seven instead of half-past six: for this gentleman, his wife, and daughter no doubt considered it exceedingly vulgar to be exactly punctual. Mrs. Boustead came on this occasion; and without any inclination to exaggerate—much less to be malicious—I am bound to declare that any one of the scullery-maids dressed up in drawing-room costume would have cut a much more respectable figure. She was about fifty years of age—exceedingly stout—with a face as rubicund as her husband's; and she had a peculiar waddle in her gait. Her arms, enormously coarse, were of a flaming red; and she had the folly to display them in their repulsive bareness. Her great red neck and shoulders were equally exposed: she wore a yellow turban surmounting a false front of flaxen hair; her dress was a bright blue satin; and she resembled a peripatetic jeweller's shop, looking as if she were completely hung in golden chains. Mr. Boustead wore knee-breeches, silk stockings, and shoes; and carried an opera hat under his arm. Euphemia was dressed out in a style which I will not pause to describe, but the flaunting gaiety of which evinced the most execrable taste. I should add that Mrs. Boustead possessed a very hoarse loud voice, and spoke as if she had been taking lessons in vocal intonations from a boatswain—or as if she had been blowing a bassoon for the previous fortnight.

No other guests were invited to

meet the Bousteads; it was evidently to be a family party—and doubtless for more reasons than one. In the first place, the Ravenshills could not be over anxious to bring the vulgarity of the Bousteads in contact with the exquisite aristocratic fastidiousness of their wonted circle of acquaintances; and in the second place, opportunities must be allowed for Mr. Walter to render himself as agreeable as possible to Miss Euphemia. I had to assist in waiting at table; and I must do Lord Ravenshill, his wife, and his son, the justice to observe that they manifested an exemplary forbearance and patience in listening to the discourse of their guests. Mr. Boustead was a purse-proud man; but though he would have given one of his eyes—and heaven knows what besides—to have been enabled to talk of his ancestors, he affected to make it his boast that he had risen from nothing. Yet he spoke of the "common people" as if he had never had anything to do with them—much less as if he had sprung from their very dregs. The words "riff-raff" and "mob," "rabble" and "unwashed," frequently interlarded his discourse. It appeared that he was a country magistrate; and he gave his lordship to understand "that he couldn't a-bear a poacher—that a vagrant was his abomination—a gipsy his horror—and a workhouse pauper a being of a degree infinitely below the most noxious of varmint." He was a rank Tory in politics, and threw out a hint that he should like to stand for the county in that interest at the next election.

Mrs. Boustead repudiated the principal rules of grammar and of correct pronunciation as boldly as did her husband: or rather I should say, she had no idea of

their existence; and being exceedingly well satisfied with her conversational ability in their absence, she illustrated the bard's somewhat paradoxical aphorism, that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." She spoke a great deal of her house, which was of course "a mansion"—and of her gardens, which were of course "grounds." Her carriages and horses—the parties she gave—the titled guests she received—and the numerous invitations which poured in upon her, and which were so provokingly numerous as to be beyond the possibility of acceptance—these also entered into the staple commodities of her discourse. As for Miss Euphemia,—she ventured to talk of Byron, and asked Mr. Walter how he liked "Childe Harold"—pronouncing the *e* at the end of the first word, and therefore making it Child-e; then flying off at a tangent with vivacious frivolity, she entertained him with a long description of how she was invited to dance by young Lord Addlepeate at the last county ball—and how she was so sorry that she was compelled to pain his lordship by a refusal—but she really could not help it—for she was already engaged thirteen deep to as many other noble lords, baronets, or honourables,—adding, with a disdainful toss of her head, that her "ma" was so particular, she never would allow her to dance with anybody who had not some title or some connexion with the aristocracy. Nothing could be more affected than her manner—nothing more flippant nor insipid than her discourse; and when I reflected that the handsome, elegant, and fastidious Walter Ravenshill was compelled to smile, look pleased, dispense flatteries, and lavish compliments upon Euphemia Bou-

stead, it was indeed enough to make the heart pity him.

Weeks wore on: the Bousteads were constant visitors at Charlton Hall—the Ravenshill family occasionally visited the Bousteads; and though it was not formally proclaimed that Mr. Walter was to wed the young lady, the match was nevertheless deemed a certainty. On the strength thereof—as I learnt from Charles—the tradesmen of the town continued to give credit; and the steward advanced some of his own money to pay the domestics an instalment of their wages. Once, in the course of conversation with Charles, I expressed my surprise that Lord Ravenshill had not already managed to borrow a sum in advance of Mr. Boustead, so as to pay off his most pressing liabilities: but Charles assured me that Euphemia's father was a very cautious and shrewd-dealing man, and that he was by no means likely to part with any of his gold until all preliminary arrangements for the marriage should have been accomplished to his entire satisfaction. Lord Ravenshill's attorney came down from London, with a large tin-box full of papers: and for several days his lordship was closetted with the man of business. Charles told me that they were making out a list of all the liabilities, and going deep into his lordship's affairs—a proceeding on which Euphemia's father had no doubt insisted. This gentleman himself, accompanied by his own solicitor from the town, was occasionally present at those conferences. At length his lordship's attorney went back to London; and in a short time it was a thoroughly understood thing that the Hon. Walter Ravenshill and Miss Boustead were engaged to each other, and that the nuptials were to be celebrated so soon

as the marriage-settlements could be drawn up and other necessary arrangements effected,—the period for the wedding being calculated for the end of March,

It was now the close of January of the New Year—namely, 1837—when an incident took place requiring especial mention. The intelligence was one morning brought to the Hall, that a dramatic company had arrived in the town, and that the theatre had been engaged for one week. Some years had elapsed, as I was informed, since any theatrical manager had been bold enough to try his fortune in that town; and the incident therefore created a perfect sensation. The matter was duly talked over in the servant's hall; and every one expressed a hope that an opportunity would be afforded for the domestics generally to indulge in the recreation for which an occasion thus presented itself. The steward was spoken to; and he not only gave his consent—but he settled the arrangements by which a portion of the servants should visit the theatre on one evening, and the other portion on the following evening,—the omnibus van which was used for taking us to church being placed at our disposal for these two occasions. A subscription was at once set afoot in the servants' hall to secure the requisite number of seats in the front row of the gallery; and one of the domestics went over to the town to settle this portion of the business. On his return, he brought with him several play-bills descriptive of the performances throughout the week for which the theatre had been engaged; and these were studied with the utmost attention and interest in the servants' hall. Amongst the various attractions thus set forth, was a dance to be performed by

a number of “young ladies belonging to the company,” and who would represent the spirits of a haunted lake,—the bill farther explaining that they would be led by “that inimitable *danseuse*, Miss Violet Mortimer—a young lady whose recent appearance in that capacity on the provincial boards had already excited so much sensation and won such rapturous applause wheresoever she had as yet exhibited.” Then followed a few extracts from critiques in some provincial journals; and these spoke of Miss Violet Mortimer as a perfect prodigy”—a ravishing creature”—“a young lady of spirit-like beauty as well as ethereal grace, and one who would prove a valuable acquisition to the London stage.” In short, it was evident enough that Miss Mortimer was the star of the company, and that immense reliance was placed by the manager upon her attractions. The perusal of these details piqued the curiosity and enhanced the excitement of the domestics at Charlton Hall into perfect enthusiasm; and when lots were drawn to decide who should visit the theatre on the first evening, one would really have thought that it was thousand pound prize to be thus contended for.

The number which I drew placed me amongst those who were to restrain their curiosity and curb their impatience until the second evening; and I must confess that I was rather annoyed at this;—for, mere boy as I was not yet sixteen years old, and never having visited a theatre in my life—I was anxious to behold those marvels the bare idea of which had so excited all my fellow-servants. It was on a Saturday that the lots were thus drawn; and the theatre was to open on the following Monday. When the evening of that day arrived, it was with some

little degree of envy that I beheld the more fortunate portion of the servants set off in the omnibus van for the town ; but Charles Linton, who was in the same category with myself, said, "Never mind, Joseph; our turn will come to-morrow evening; and as you have never been to a theatre before, you shall sit next to me, and I will give you all necessary explanations. By the bye, my boy, you must not for a moment fancy that all the wonderful attractions set forth in these inflaming bills are going to be realized: it is a mere manager's trick to draw a house; and all the fine talk of splendid decorations, dazzling costumes, and new scenery, will dwindle down into comparative insignificance. I dare say that even Miss—what's-her name—Violet Mortimer—an excellent theatrical name by the way—will be no exception to the rule, and that those who have just gone in the hope of seeing something extraordinary, will return sadly disappointed. However, we will sit up, if you like—and hear what they say."

This I agreed to do : but it was near one o'clock in the morning before the domestics returned ; and for once in his life, Charles Linton was altogether wrong. They came back in perfect raptures with the pieces, the decorations, the scenery, and the performance—but chiefly of all with the personal beauty and the graceful dancing of Violet Mortimer. They declared that the representations in the play-bills were in no wise exaggerated—and that this young lady was a perfect prodigy of loveliness, elegance, and fascination. It appeared that the theatre was crowded to excess—and that Miss Mortimer was called before the curtain and enthusiastically applauded. My curiosity was now

more than ever excited ; and I noticed that Charles himself—hitherto the only one who had talked coldly of the affair—began to be inspired with the same sentiment.

On the following evening I entered the omnibus in company with those of my fellow-servants whose turn it now was to visit the theatre. Lord Ravenshill had taken a box for this occasion—where himself, her ladyship, and Mr. Walter were to be joined by the Bousteads. During the drive of three miles to the town I sat wondering what a theatre was like, and joyously anticipating an experience of that pleasure which the other portion of the domestics had revelled in on the previous evening. On entering the establishment, Charles—according to promise—kept me by his side : we had front seats in the gallery, and could therefore command an excellent view of the stage and the whole house, every part of which was perfectly crammed. We beheld the Ravenshills and the Bousteads seated in a box near the stage ; and, amongst the rest of the company, we recognised many of those families who were accustomed to visit at Charlton Hall.

The curtain drew up; and then for the first time in my life, I beheld the attractions of a stage. I have since seen the great metropolis theatre ; and, as a matter of course, in comparison therewith, a small provincial one sinks into utter insignificance : but to me who was *then* contemplating the spectacle for the first time, it was fraught with the most pleasing and exciting interest. The actors and actresses appeared to be magnificently dressed,—the former likewise having the air of the handsomest of men, and the latter that of the loveliest of women. Charles saw how much I

was delighted ; and comprehending the effect which tinsel and other theatrical delusions were making upon my mind, he smiled and whispered a few words of explanation,—letting me into the secret of what stage apparel was, and how rouge and other succedaneous contrivances invested ugliness with attractions. Still I was pleased ; and I asked which of those beautiful ladies was Miss Violet Mortimer ?—but on referring to the play-bill, Charles informed me that she would not appear till the third scene, when the dance of the fairies on the shore of the haunted lake would take place.

The first and second scenes were terminated ; and when the curtain ascended upon the third, the stage, darkened into semi-obscurity, represented a lake the banks of which were fringed with trees. The manner in which the water—or what served as water appeared to send forth its glimmering twilight-shine, struck me as being peculiarly effective. Indeed, Charles, himself—though disposed to be hypercritical on the occasion—admitted that it was very well managed for provincial theatre. The music began to play a low but not melancholy strain: it was to represent a cheerful harmony sweetly floating over the lake in the distance. Then, from either side of the stage, the fairies came gliding on, looking most ravishingly beautiful with their light gauzy dresses, their azure wings, and their long hair floating over their bare shoulders. They held in their hands wands tipped with stars; and these glitted brightly with the reflection of the stage lights that were hidden from the view. Moreover,—to enhance the delusion that these star-tipped wands themselves sent forth that soft argentine lustre which per-

vaded the scene,—a cold silvery light was by some contrivance shed from the sides of the stage. Altogether the scene was most effective. Again I asked which was Violet Mortimer ?—but scarcely was the question put, and before it was answered, several voices exclaimed rapturously, “Here she is!”—and as another figure glided quickly in, with magically glancing feet, upon the stage, thunders of applause burst forth. But, good heavens ! was it a shock of wonderment which seized upon me ? or was it an overpowering sensation of pleasure which I at the moment experienced ? Could it indeed be possible that in Violet Mortimer I recognised the loved and cherished Annabel ?

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BEHIND THE SCENES. •

I DO not know whether an ejaculation expressive of my feelings burst from my lips—but I think not: I believe that whatever those feelings were, they must have stricken me speechless; —for neither Charles Linton nor any other person near me, observed that I displayed an unusual emotion, beyond that of pleasure and delight which appeared to animate all present. Violet acknowledged with a graceful curtsey the enthusiastic reception which she thus experienced; and then, as applause died away, the fairy dance commenced. I sat riveted to my place—my looks fascinated—all my feelings spell-bound. Was it indeed she ? Yes—how could I doubt it ? Could I possibly mistake that tall, slight, beautifully-modelled figure, whose every motion was poetry and seemed to correspond

with the harmony of the features? could I mistake those clustering masses of golden hair which floated over her shoulders, like a thick veil of glossy silk thrown back? Did any other being on the face of the earth possess that brilliant animation of the skin—alabaster everywhere, save in respect to the coral lips, and where art appeared to have shed upon the cheeks the hue of the blushing rose? What *other* creature in female shape was endowed with so rare a beauty? And that figure, too, which seemed almost aerial—so that one might imagine that if the hands clasped the tapering waist the fingers would meet, and the slightest upward impulse would serve to whirl her up into that ethereal region whence, with the azure wings upon her shoulders, she appeared to have come down! I was too remote to catch the expression of her countenance; and yet the longer I gazed, the more was I enabled to picture to myself that mild look which Annabel wore, now somewhat elevated from its soft sweet melancholy into an animation bordering upon radiance.

For some minutes I was so entranced with mingled wonder and delight, that I was unable to analyze my own thoughts,—until I began to experience a painful under-current of feeling creeping in unto my soul. That Annabel should be *there*, naturally gave birth to the supposition that she must have fled from her home—and perhaps on account of me! How, otherwise, could she—the pure-minded the ingenuous, the virtue-loving Annabel—have been thrown by destiny into the midst of a company of performers? how else could she have been driven into a pursuit which I should have deemed the last in all the world to be voluntarily

sought by her, compelling her as it were to leap with a sudden bound from the seclusion of her recent existence into the dazzling, wildering, intoxicating blaze of popular favour? Was it really Annabel—that Annabel whom but a few months back I had known as the personification of charming goodness—the retiring maiden invested with the candour of sweet fifteen? Alas, alas! it must be—I and I *alone*—who had proved the cause of this wondrous—and not less painful than wondrous—change in her circumstances!

Such were the reflections which, after beginning with a gradual creeping to enter my mind, poured in like a trooping crowd, and surged up as it were into my very brain. But still I sat and gazed upon her as she led the fairy dance by the side of the haunted lake. Yes; every motion was in itself music,—so that the real music which was playing failed to be observed, and whatsoever harmony pervaded within those walls seemed to be the effluence of a lovely form expending its spiritualized feeling in movements of the animal frame. Slowly began that dance—it grew more rapid—but I beheld only *one* of the dancers. On her my looks were riveted: not for a single instant did they wander away from her: not for a moment did they settle elsewhere. Her exquisite figure seemed quickened by the etherealizing spirit into outlines and attitudes of nature's own gracefulness,—changing from one to another in transitions which still grew more rapid as she went on gliding, and floating, and flying amidst the scenery representing shrubs and trees on the border of that imitation lake. All those movements appeared to have the power of airy words—an eloquence all their own, even

while the voice was not heard : for there was no speaking amongst the dancers—the music of the orchestra was alone the source of sounds, until the curtain slowly descended upon the scene: and then the enthusiastic plaudits from the audience burst forth anew.

Still I sat in a scarcely describable state of feeling ; and twice did Charles Linton inquire whether I was pleased with the representation, ere I gave him a response. I remember not what I said : but it must have been something vague, and doubtless to his conception puerile to a degree; for he laughed, observing that my raptured state of feeling was far more complimentary to Violet Mortimer's talents than even the thunders of applause which had succeeded the descent of the curtain. I was about to express myself with a frankness which the excited state of my mind prompted,—when I suddenly remembered that I must forbear from mentioning the Lanovers, as that name had never once passed my lips during the whole time I had been to Lord Ravenshill's service : and so I held my peace. As the play proceeded, I watched eagerly for the re-appearance of Violet Mortimer : but she came not on again until the last act,—and then to lead another fairy dance. I will not recapitulate the poetic attractions of her performance, nor the feelings with which I contemplated her: it would be a mere work of supererogation. The curtain descended again: and the first drama in the list of the evening's entertainment being thus over, she was summoned before the curtain. The manager led her on : the footlights were now blazing—she was enveloped in lustre—and again I asked myself whether it were all a dream, or

whether I really beheld the idolized Annabel—the object of my boyish love—in that gauzy costume, thus displaying almost shamelessly her bare shoulders and neck, and with the flesh-coloured apparel revealing the symmetry of her limbs ! Then too, at that moment, a sensation of sickness came over me: and I felt I could have laid down my life cheerfully—Oh, so cheerfully!—to save Annabel such a destiny as this, if it could have been foreseen on that memorable night when she enabled me to escape from her father's house.

Yes: it was a sickness that came over me—a faintness accompanied by a swimming of the brain and a dimness of the eyes,—so that I felt as if I were about to sink down in a swoon. But I was suddenly recalled, as it were into full vitality again, by a fresh outburst of tremendous applause ; and as I glanced towards the stage, I caught a glimpse of her fairy figure, as still holding the manager's hand, she disappeared from the view of the audience. Then a sudden idea sprang up within me. I must see Annabel—or at least I must see this Violet Mortimer : I must see her *close*—so as to leave no doubt in my mind that she and Annabel were one and the same. Doubt ? I entertained no doubt ! It was the last faint hope of very despair itself,—a hope suggesting that it was just possible that it might *not* be Annabel after all. And yet—singularly paradoxical and contradictory as this explanation of my feelings may be—I had the firm conviction that it *was* Annabel, and could be no other! But I must see her—I must speak to her—I must implore her pardon for having been the cause of this tremendous change in her position ! Yes—on my knees must I implore her forgiveness for hav-

ing on that memorable night consented to save myself at the risk of leaving her exposed to all the most frightful consequences—which consequences did indeed appear to have been most fatally realized: or else how was it that I now beheld her in that position?

I started up from my seat so suddenly that Charles Linton thought I was unwell; and catching me by the arm, he offered to go out with me. But I said that I should be back in a few minutes; and he did not attempt to detain, nor persist in his proposal to accompany me. I made my way amidst the crowd which thronged the gallery, treading upon the toes of some—disordering divers shawls, and achieving the discomfiture of sundry bonnets;—but scarcely waiting to apologize for each fresh act of hasty awkwardness, I reached the staircase. Down this I hurried precipitately; but on finding myself in the entrance way or vestibule, I suddenly stopped short, not knowing how to proceed. Observing the man who had taken the gallery-tickets, I accosted him,—saying that I wished to speak to one of the performers. He asked me to whom I alluded? I replied, “Miss Mortimer:”—whereupon he remarked, perceiving that I was in livery, and had the well-known crest of the Ravenshill family upon my button, “I presume you have some message from my lord or her ladyship for Miss Mortimer?”

“Yes, yes,” I answered quickly, at once comprehending that it was only by means of such a subterfuge my aim could be accomplished.

“Well, then, my lad,” continued the man, “go up the little narrow passage by the side of the theatre; and you will see the stage-entrance.”

I thanked him and hurried away, delighted with the success of my application. Issuing forth from the theatre, I passed round into an obscure lane which divided it from the adjacent house—and speedily reached a little narrow door with an ascent of about a dozen dirty wooden steps, more like a ladder than a stair. Pushing open another door at the top, I found myself in the back part of the stage; and as the curtain was down, the carpenters and scene-shifters were busily preparing for the opening of the next piece. One of the “fairies” was standing near; and on beholding her thus close, I was struck—nay, positively shocked at her appearance. Beautiful as she had seemed in the distance, the dispelling of the illusion produced a cruel effect upon my mind. Her showy fanciful costume was of the coarsest muslin, covered with the tawdriest ornaments and the most worthless tinsel: her jaded look was by no means concealed by the deep patches of rouge upon her thin hollow cheeks. She could not have been more than two or three-and-twenty: she had evidently once been pretty—and these were the pitiful remains of that beauty! When viewed thus near, there was only that false glitter of appearance which betokened amidst its ruins something originally of superior things. Yes—I was shocked; and I was turning away with even a sense of loathing, when she suddenly spoke to one of the carpenters, giving utterance to a coarse jest in a hoarse, broken voice. Still more was the illusion dispelled. I hurried on, plunging farther behind the scenes, with the sickening idea in my soul that such as this wretched creature now seemed, might Annabel soon become—unless snatched away from the health.

wasting, soul-contaminating avocations and influences amongst which destiny appeared to have cast her. But all in a moment I stopped short: for, on the opposite side of the stage—leaning against a piece of scenery—appeared the object of my presence there.

And now my soul was suddenly smitten with another blow. She was listening, with a sort of half-bashfulness, half-pleasure upon her countenance, to something that a young gentleman was whispering in her ear; and this young gentleman I at once recognised to be Sir Malcolm Wavenham—a gay and profligate Baronet who had only recently come into a very large fortune, and who was a frequent visitor at Charlton Hall. But the moment after this suspicion, so injurious to Annabel, had entered my mind, I felt how ungenerous it was; and I strove to banish it: for I said to myself that it was not because Sir Malcolm was a dissipated rake she must necessarily be giving him encouragement. And, indeed, scarcely had I thus conceived this thought in her favour, when I observed that she suddenly drew herself up in a dignified manner, and made some remark, which however I could not catch at that distance, but which struck me as being accompanied with a look of indignation. A feeling of joy warmed my heart: it was an infinite relief to the cruel suspicion which but a few moments back had sprung up there. Still, however, the conversation went on between herself and Sir Malcolm Wavenham; and I heard him say, ‘But, my dear Miss Mortimer, a young lady of your beauty—’

Then she interrupted him, raising her finger to her lip: I thought and hoped it was to imply

that she was not to be addressed in so familiar a manner, nor in such terms of flattery. But still the discourse went on, again continued in a hushed voice on the part of the Baronet, and listened to by her with downcast eyes of bashfulness, yet with a certain animation of the cheeks,—an animation deeper and more natural than the artificial rose which had slightly covered them. Oh! I thought to myself—why, Annabel—Oh, why listen longer to that man at all? And young though I was, I had no difficulty in suspecting that his aims and hopes were neither creditable to himself nor honourable to her. It was therefore with a reviving anguish of heart that I gazed upon that symmetrical form of sylphid shape, yet giving promise of fulness in its proportions;—I gazed, too, upon that countenance which my mind had so faithfully treasured up: but I could not now catch the sweet azure eyes—for they were bent down; and the long silken lashes, so many shades darker than the lustrous flood of her golden hair, reposed upon her cheeks. She had not as yet observed that I was near: she had not caught a glimpse of me. Oh! what would she think—what would she say, if raising her eyes, they suddenly turned to rest upon me? Ah! I said to myself, that if I had not thus beheld her in discourse with that young man, I should have sprung forward and caught her in my arms, unmidful of whosoever might have beheld the action.

I had been standing there some three or four minutes, thus gazing upon her, and while that conversation was progressing in its hushed tones,—when Sir Malcolm Wavenham suddenly proffered his hand. She shook her head: I marked that an expression of

annoyance, of mingled pride and anger appeared upon *his* features; then he said something about "altering her mind" and "letting him know to-morrow." This was all I could catch; and he turned abruptly away. She remained standing there with her looks bent down, and in an attitude of extreme pensiveness. While my eyes for a moment followed the retreating form of the young Baronet, as he traversed the stage towards the same door by which I had entered,—I noticed that one of the scene-shifters jerked his thumb significantly over his shoulder towards Violet Mortimer; and then, in the same meaning manner, he indicated Wavenham,—his leer-ing look having a corresponding expression; and the companion for whose behoof he accomplished this dumb-show, gave a coarse, chuckling laugh. Good heavens! I thought to myself, that Annabel—the pure-minded, chaste-souled Annabel, as I had known her—should have become the object of the ribald significancy of these coarse men! Again I felt coming over me that sickening sensation which had seized me in the gallery;—but she—the object of my presence here—was at the moment about to move away; and darting across the stage, I stood before her. Oh! now I was destined to experience another shock. She drew herself up with a kind of hauteur, and looked so coldly upon me—yes, so coldly with her beautiful azure eyes, that I was confounded. But this overpowering sense quickly fled; and in a voice fraught with a full gush of feeling, I said, "Annabel!"

She started—Oh, how she started, as if electrified! And, strange, as well as painful indeed, was the look which she bent upon me—not cold and haughty *now*, but full of a mournful tender-

ness: and how ineffably, how pathetically sweet!

"Annabel—dear Annabel!" I said, murmuringly, as I caught her hand in my own: "you know not what pleasure and what pain I experience to meet you now!"

She burst into tears—drew back her hand with a sudden spasmodic violence—and the next moment disappeared from my view. I remained rooted to the spot like one annihilated. Darkness seemed to have suddenly sprung up where brightness had reigned an instant before. It was like a dream. I felt bewildered: my brain was turning. Suddenly recovering the power of movement, I hurried in the same direction where she had disappeared;—and I speedily became involved amidst a perfect maze of ropes, windlasses, spars, beams, and all kinds of theatrical machinery.

"Now then, youngster—where are you rushing to?" demanded a gruff voice.

"Here—stand back!" said another rough-looking individual, seizing me by the shoulder: and then a huge scene glided in front of me—so that I was quite bewildered and knew not which way to proceed.

"What do you want, my lad?" asked a tall man decked out in a fancy costume of threadbare velvet, faded ribands, and tinsel ornaments.

"I wished to speak to Annabel," I exclaimed, almost frantically.

"Annabel?" he repeated.

"Miss Mortimer, I mean," were my next words, also spoken with nervous rapidity.

"What for? who do you come from? have you got any message?"

"No," I said: "It is on my own account—"

The tall man laughed outright: and then catching me by the

arm, he said, "You have no business here. How the deuce did you find your way behind the scenes?"

"Miss Mortimer will see me!" I exclaimed, struggling to release myself, as he hurried me towards the stage-door.

"Well, if that's the case," he observed, suddenly stopping short, "you shall see her. But we will inquire first. You must know, my boy, that I am the manager here; and things can't be done in this wild way:"—then beckoning to a woman, apparelled in the most tawdry style, and who was of course one of the actresses, he said, "Here, Polly, just go and ask Miss Mortimer if she likes to see a young chap in livery—By the bye, what name?"

"Joseph Wilmot," I answered quickly, and with the feverish hope that in a few instants I should again be in the presence of Annabel.

"Well—say Joseph Wilmot, then," continued the manager, again speaking to the tawdrily-dressed actress.

The woman disappeared behind some of the scenery; and in a few moments came back, saying, "Miss Mortimer knows him not—and declines seeing anybody."

"There, young chap—you have got your answer," exclaimed the manager; and with the strength of a giant he hurried me over to the stage-door. A bell rang and the music struck up, just as he gave me a push which precipitated me down the steps; the door was closed at the head of those stairs—and I heard a bolt drawn.

I stood in the dark alley, with the tears rolling down my cheeks: I wept as if my heart were about to break. I said to myself in the wild bitterness of my anguish, "Annabel repudiates me! she will not know me! Is it pride be-

cause she once more finds me clothed in the garb of servitude? or is it because she cannot look me in the face as but a few months back she was enabled frankly and ingenuously to do? No, no—it is not pride, or else Annabel must indeed be strangely altered. But it is shame—it is shame!"

I remember that I leant against the wall in that dark alley for support: I was almost crushed and trampled down by the power of my tremendous anguish. I knew not what to do. How could I tear myself away without making another effort to have speech of Annabel?—but of what avail to renew the attempt, if she were so decided in not meeting me again? And now, too, occurred the reflection that it would pain her if I were to persevere in my endeavours to force myself into her presence: and oh! to inflict pain upon the heart of Annabel—I could not do it! Slowly I threaded my way down that alley towards the entrance: but just as I was about to emerge forth, my ear caught the sound of a well-known voice speaking in the street. It was that of Sir Malcolm Wavenham.

"I shall know all about it tomorrow," he was saying. "I could not get a decisive answer this evening. I can't make her out. She is either really a virtuous girl—or else a very adept in dissimulation.

"A virtuous girl, dancing on the stage!" ejaculated another voice, with an ironical laugh. "My dear Wavenham, you are mad to think such a thing. Come—let us smoke a cigar along the street and talk it over."

The Baronet and his friend (some gentleman who was unknown to me) thereupon moved away; but once more had I been painfully shocked at hearing Annabel thus spoken of. I linger-

ed for a few minutes to compose my feelings as well as I was able: for I saw the necessity of speedily returning into the theatre; or else my fellow-servants—Charles Linton especially—would consider my absence strange; and I should be overwhelmed with disagreeable questions. If so, I was determined not to answer them. I said to myself, “Annabel has a mother who cannot possibly have counselled her daughter to adopt this line of life. Perhaps she is even ignorant of it; and never from my lips shall any one learn that the daughter of so good a mother is identical with Violet Mortimer the dancing-girl.”

I return to the gallery, Linton thought I had been unwell; I did not undeceive him; and indeed my looks were pale and troubled as to confirm his conjecture. I will not linger at unnecessary length upon this portion of my narrative; suffice it to say that I did not pay the least attention to the remainder of the performance, because the playbill showed me that Violet Mortimer was not again to make her appearance this evening. All the time that the other pieces lasted, I sat with my eyes fixed upon the stage, it is true—but gazing upon vacancy, and literally seeing nothing. I was glad when Charles told me that everything was over:—and when we were all once more seated in the omnibus, I lay back in a corner, wrapped up in the most sorrowing reflections. My fellow-servants thought that I slept through weariness; and during the whole ride they joyously discussed the details of the evening’s amusements.

That night the pillow on which my aching head reposed was plentelously moistened with tears; and fervid were the prayers which I poured forth that heaven would extend its shielding influ-

ence over Annabel, and save her from those designs—too obviously criminal—which were entertained towards her by Sir Malcolm Wavenham

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### FATHER AND SON.

I CAN scarcely tell how the next two days passed. I walked about like one in a dream—but performing all my ordinary duties with a kind of mechanical regularity. My exterior aspect must have been one of unnatural composure, as my fellow-servants did not observe that there was anything extraordinary on my part—save and except Charles Linton, who on two or three occasions inquired if I were unwell, and he said that I looked very pale. I answered that I was: whereupon he observed that the heated atmosphere of the crowded theatre had probably upset me—but that I should recover myself in a very short time.

During these two days I revolved a thousand wild plans in my mind in respect to her whose image was ever uppermost in my soul, and in whose welfare I experienced so deep an interest. At one moment I thought of writing to her mother, even at the risk of the letter falling into the hands of the dreaded Lanover; and it was not the fear of *this* which prevented me—for I would have sacrificed my life for the benefit of Annabel: but I reasoned that the mother herself might have left her home at the same time as the daughter—and that even if it were otherwise, I should be interfering in Annabel’s affairs in a way which might provoke her imagination against me. A hundred times during each of

those two days, did I think of making an attempt to see Annabel: for it would not be difficult to obtain permission to visit the town under pretence of making some necessary purchase. But here again that same fear of seeming to be an impertinent meddler with her proceedings held me back. I thought of Edith, whom I believed to be still residing at the adjacent village; and I was half inclined to seek out that young lady, tell her everything relative to Annabel, and beseech her good offices on behalf of this fair young creature. But here again would there be direct interference in her affairs: and moreover I knew that Miss Delmar must have sufficient sorrows of her own to engage her attention, without mixing herself up in the pursuits of another person. In short, whatever plan suggested itself to my mind had to be abandoned: I was bewildered—and knew not how to act.

It was the morning of the third day after the visit to the theatre, that one of the footmen, who had been over as usual to the town to fetch his lordship's letters from the post-office, came into the servants' hall with an expression of countenance which showed that he had some intelligence to communicate.

"What news?" inquired one of the other domestics.

"News?—pretty news indeed!" ejaculated the footman. "Such a scene as there was at the theatre last evening!"

I was about to leave the room at the moment to perform some task which I had in hand—when these words, fraught with a sudden interest for me, kept me there: but smitten with the presentiment that I was about to hear something relative to her whose image filled my soul, I had the presence

of mind to linger at a distance from the group of domestics, and to keep my looks averted from them.

"A scene at the theatre?" ejaculated several voices.

"Yes," answered the footman: "the place was crowded as usual to see Miss Mortimer—but when the time arrived for her appearance, she was not forthcoming. The scene was delayed—the audience grew clamorous—and the manager was obliged to come forward and give some explanation. All he could say was that Miss Mortimer had not been to the theatre the whole evening: he had sent to her lodgings—she had left them early in the afternoon—and no one knew whither she was gone. The audience would not at first receive this explanation: they fancied there was some trick in it. But soon certain scandalous whispers began circulating about: laughs and jeers broke forth; and the name of Sir Malcolm Wavenham passed from lip to lip."

I remained to hear no more: already had I heard too much:—and hastening up to my own chamber, I sank upon a seat, weeping bitterly—violently—convulsively! I mourned as heaven might be supposed to mourn over a fallen angel: the idea of associating the lovely image of Annabel with guilt, was something which appeared to rive my heart to its very core. When, after the first gush of almost mortal anguish, I was capable of deliberate reflection, I remembered how but a few months back I had sat in the chamber at the Ravensbill Hall meditating upon Annabel after reading the note which I found in the purse—how I vowed that her image, *then* to me so saint-like and so angelic, should serve my good genius—and how I indulged in the pleasing conviction that,

under all circumstances, Annabel was sure to remain in the path of rectitude. Oh ! had she indeed fallen ? Again went up the voice of agony from my soul, asking this question ! Had she indeed fallen ? or was it not a hideous dream ? No—it was a frightful reality :—for had not the footman spoken positively ? and was not the catastrophe at which he had hinted a sequence of the incidents which had come to my own knowledge ?—I mean the attentions that Sir Malcolm Wavenham had paid to Annabel at the theatre, and the discourse which I had overheard between himself and his friend in the narrow dark lane adjoining. But now for an instant—and alas ! only for an instant—did the idea spring up in my mind that Annabel had possibly fled with Sir Malcolm to become his wife. No: the terms in which the footman had spoken of those scandalous whisperings—those laughings and jeerings, which had occurred on the previous night at the theatre,—together with the known dissipated and profligate character of Sir Malcolm Wavenham,—all forbade the thought with which for a moment I had endeavoured to cheer myself.

I felt as if I had really nothing worth living for in the world; and if death had come to me then, its presence would have been most welcome. But scarcely had I said this to myself, when a secret voice within my soul whispered that the thought was a wicked one—and that it was sinful for a human being to wish to anticipate his destiny as ordained by Providence, just because another human being had gone astray. I felt that I ought to take courage—to resign myself as much as possible to whatsoever amount of sorrow I now experienced on Annabel's account—and that, above all

things I must not by my altered demeanour or saddening looks, lay myself open to be unpleasantly interrogated by my fellow-servants. Accordingly, having dried my tears, I hastened from my chamber to attend to my duties, and not without the hope that in the bustle and activity thereof I might to a certain degree lose the keen sense of extreme affliction. For some purpose or another, I had to seek Mr. Ravenshill's own private apartment,—on entering which, I perceived that gentleman seated at a table with his countenance buried in his hands; and at the moment I opened the door, a convulsive sob met my ear.

It is even a sadder thing to behold a man than a woman weeping. Women are more inclined to tears for slight causes than members of the sterner sex; and it must always be some potent cause of bitter anguish indeed which can plunge a man into such woe as that wherein I now saw my young master immersed.

“O my God, what a sacrifice !” he ejaculated, suddenly springing up to his feet. “Anything were preferable—anything!—aye, even suicide !”

These words were uttered with a vehement excitement; and as Walter Ravenshill turned round, he beheld me quickly retiring : for I did not of course like to intrude upon such a sacred scene as that of the unfortunate young gentleman's excruciating anguish.

“Stop, Joseph—stop ! come hither !” he exclaimed, rushing after me : and as in my confusion and bewilderment, I did not at once show signs of obeying—but, on the contrary, was continuing my retreat, he seized me by the arm, and dragged me into the room. Then, shutting the door and placing his back against it,

he demanded in a low hoarse voice, and with a very pale face,—"How long had you been standing there?"

"Only a few instants, sir," was my answer.

"Only a few instants?" he said, repeating my words.

But you heard what fell from my lips? Now, Joseph, shall you not mention every particular of this scene to your fellow-servants?"

"Certainly not, sir," I responded energetically. "In order to avoid hearing or seeing more, I was hastening away—"

"True!" he observed. "But why did you not knock at the door?"

"I did, sir; and as no answer was returned, I concluded that no one was here."

"And you are sure that you will not mention what you beheld or heard?"

"Not for the world, sir:"—and then I added with a certain flaming up of my natural spirit, "I am no spy upon your actions."

"Well, Joseph, I know you are a good boy," continued Mr. Ravenshill, after a brief pause, during which he contemplated me earnestly. "And now tell me the truth—do not the servants talk amongst themselves about the—the approaching marriage?"—and a ghastly expression of anguish swept over his countenance as he with difficulty brought himshlf to give utterance to these words.

"I hope, sir," was my answer, "that you will not induce me to become a tell-tale—especially as if I were, you would no longer have the full confidence that I should forbear speaking of your own concerns."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, pressing one of his hands to his brow, "I understand but too well that it is so! Yes—yes—I am laughed at

and ridiculed behind my back! By heaven, it is intolerable!"—then, as if suddenly repenting, or rather vexed himself that he should thus have given way to his feelings in my presence, he caught me by the shoulder, saying in an excited manner, "Do not think any more, Joseph, of what you have heard fall from my lips: bolt it out from your memory!"

With these words he abruptly quitted the room; and I had no longer any doubt that the unfortunate young gentleman regarded with loathing and abhorrence the marriage into which family circumstances were about to force him.

That very same evening the Bousteads were to dine at Charlton Hall. They came, a little before seven o'clock, in their gaudy equipage; and dinner was almost immediately served up. I had to assist in waiting at table; and it struck me that Mrs. Boustead spoke in a hoarser voice than usual, and with a certain degree of incoherency. I could not help looking at her: and I likewise observed that she was drinking a great deal of wine. Presently I saw Euphemia making signs to her mother, when the young lady fancied herself unperceived by any one else: but Mrs. Boustead paid no attention to them, and actually helped herself to wine—a proceeding of which no well-bred lady is ever guilty. Lord Ravenshill looked uncommonly grave: her ladyship exchanged with him a rapidly significant glance: Mr. Ravenshill appeared downright distressed. As I went out into the hall to fetch something that was needed, I heard one of the footmen say to another, "The old lady is getting quite jolly, and will be blazing drunk presently."

The scene of the morning with Mr. Walter came vividly back to

my mind ; and I could scarcely wonder at his utter repugnance to form a matrimonial alliance with such a family. When I went back into the dining-room, I heard Euphemia saying, " My dear ma, I am sure you are unwell : you had much better retire and lie down a little. You know when you *do* have these dreadful headaches—"

" Lawk-a-daisy, Phemy, dear ! " interrupted Mrs. Boustead, speaking very thick with her hoarse bassoon-like voice ; [ havn't got never a headache : I am quite right. Dear me ! what a pretty young page you have got, my lord. When the event comes off, " she added, looking with a sort of half-vacant significance towards her daughter and the Hon. Mr. Ravenshill, " we must manage to get the young couple just such another likely-looking boy, and stick him into a nice livery like that."

I felt myself blushing up to the very hair of my head at thus being made the object of Mrs. Boustead's remarks ; and turning away towards the side-board, affected to be very busily engaged in arranging the dessert dishes.

" By the bye, said Mr. Boustead, most probably catching at the first subject that came into his head, in order to put a stop to his wife's garrulity,— " has your ludship heard of Sir Malcolm Wavenham's precious exploit ? "

" I cannot say that I have, " answered Lord Ravenshill ; and now I was all attention—but painfully and nervously so ; for I was not at a loss to conjecture the subject about to be introduced.

" Why, he's took away that dancing gal, " continued Mr. Boustead,— " Violet Mortimer I mean—which we saw t'other night at the theatre. I wonder you haven't heard tell of it : it was the talk of the whole town when

I was there this morning. And such a shindy as there was at the theatre last night—my eyes, such a shindy ! "

I felt that my emotions were overpowering me—so keenly were they re-awakened by the turn which the discourse had thus taken ; and I hurried from the room. My duties, however, compelled me to go back again in about ten minutes ; and then I found to my infinite relief and satisfaction that the conversation was progressing on some other topic. Mrs. Boustead was now swaying from side to side on her chair in a visible state of inebriety. I should observe that no other guests were present—which circumstance was doubtless a matter of self-congratulation on the part of the Ravenshill family. The cloth had been taken off the table—the dessert was about to be placed on—when all of a sudden Mrs. Boustead, losing her equilibrium, plumped down upon the carpet. Euphemia screamed—and either fainted in reality, or else thought it requisite to simulate a swoon. The utmost confusion prevailed—the lady's-maids were summoned—and the men-servants hastened to quit the room on a signal from his lordship. But before crossing the threshold, I could not help casting a look back upon that deplorable scene. Lady Ravenshill sat as if transfixed in her chair : his lordship, who had risen up, looked cold and stern : Mr. Boustead had hurried to the assistance of his wife, whose turban and false front had fallen off with the tumble : Mr. Walter was conveying Euphemia to a sofa. In the hall the butler and the footmen who had witnessed the scene, hesitated not to express their disgust in no measured terms : but I did not hear a single syllable of pity vouchsafed for their young master. On the

contrary, the butler emphatically declared that it served him right for thinking of throwing himself away on the vulgar daughter of such upstart persons. About half an hour afterwards the Bousteads' carriage was ordered; and they took their departure,—Mr. Boustead talking very loud as he traversed the hall, about "his good lady having fallen into an apoplectic fit, to which she was subject."

In the servants' hall nothing was spoken of all the rest of the evening but the incident just related. I myself was much excited by the varied feelings that were agitating within me. The image of Annabel haunted me like the pale ghost of her own former pure self; and I was moved with an illimitable compassion for the unfortunate Walter Ravenshill. The discourse of my fellow-domestics increased the painful nature of my feelings: my blood was hot and feverish in my veins—my brows throbbed with racking pains. I went forth into the garden to woo the cold night air of February. There was an arbour formed by evergreens;—and into the darkness of this embowering retreat I plunged, as if feeling it necessary to seek the completest solitude and seclusion for my torturing reflections. I had not been there many moments, when I suddenly became aware that footsteps were approaching along the gravel walk; and almost immediately afterwards, other footsteps—more hurried—came from behind the individual who was thus advancing. Then I heard voices.

"Walter—my dear Walter, do not afflict yourself thus!" said Lord Ravenshill, who had thus evidently hastened after his son.

"Afflict myself, father?" ejaculated the young master, in tones full of bitterness: "how

would you have me be consoled?"

They had both stopped short exactly in front of the arbour in which I had plunged myself;—but hoping that they would speedily pass on, I did not choose to issue forth at once and thus make them aware that I had overheard a single syllable of what was being said. But there they remained; and as the impassioned dialogue went on, I felt that it was too late to emerge thence—as they would naturally be angry that I should have tarried even for a single moment. I was thus against my will rendered a listener to all that took place.

"How would you have me be consoled, father?" repeated Walter Ravenshill, with a degree of anguished bitterness that it was very sad to associate with one who was thus in the spring-time of his existence. "Look at the fearful sacrifice I am called upon to consummate! Even if the girl were the loveliest of her sex, and herself a model of gentle breeding and polished courtesy, it would still be a horror to enter that family! No, father—I cannot do it! Ruin may overtake us—your creditors may seize upon everything—we may be driven forth from the home of our ancestors—but even *this* would be a less degradation than the necessity of my taking such a wife, and calling such a man my father-in-law—such a woman my mother-in-law!"

"Walter, do not speak thus!" said Ravenshill, in a tone of the most earnest entreaty. "Think you not that I feel it all as much as you? think you not that my heart bleeds at the idea of this alliance? Yes—indeed it does! But what is to be done? The alternatives are before you. On the one hand, immediate ruin for us all—on the other hand marriage with this girl."

"Marriage with that girl!" exclaimed Walter, with augmenting vehemence. "No—I tell you, father, it is impossible! And now hear me. I am young—and the world is before me. You have interest, and can procure for me a Government situation—a diplomatic post—or at least a commission in the Army. I would sooner remain poor than marry that girl as the condition of becoming rich. I am decided—nothing shall change me; and to-morrow you can write to Mr. Boustead to inform him of my resolve."

"And to-morrow, when this shall be known," answered Lord Ravenshill, in a low deep voice, "there will be an execution put into the house. The creditors are merely holding back under the promise of having their demands liquidated when the marriage takes place."

"Then let the creditors come!" ejaculated Walter, passionately—almost fiercely. "Why am I to be sacrificed to stave them off? Look you, father!—the ruin which is about to fall upon our house, if not commenced by you, will at least have been consummated by you. The very day that I came of age, you asked me to sign certain papers, with the assurance that they were mere formalities necessary on the part of your heir. I did so, I troubled myself not to read their contents—I did not think that my own father would rob, and plunder, and defraud me!"

"Walter!" exclaimed the old nobleman: "these words—"

"Oh, they may be harsh—but they are true!" exclaimed the young nobleman, with a still increasing storm of anguished passion, "Yes—they are true, and you know it! Did you make any sacrifice for me? did you tell me frankly and candidly the difficulties of your position? did you

offer to go abroad for some years that the estate might be nursed? did you propose to put down a single carriage or sell a single horse? did you suggest the propriety of breaking up one of these establishments? did you, in a word, volunteer the most trifling reduction of your own expenditure to pay of the terrific liabilities which were engulfing the property that is my birthright, and which I ought at your death to receive free and unencumbered? No—nothing of all this did you do! Far from it. But you induced me to sign documents rendering me a joint contractor with yourself in ruinous mortgages: and then, as soon as my eyes were opened to the fatal truth, what alternative was there but that I should plunge recklessly onward in the descending path where your foul treachery had placed my footsteps? This has been your conduct, father!"

"Walter, Walter—I conjure you, spare me!" interrupted the wretched nobleman, in the convulsing voice of shame, remorse, and anguish.

"No—hear me out!" continued the son, now stern and implacable in the vehemence of his excited feelings and his infuriate rage: hear me out, I say—and then you will see how little reason you have to reproach me for the decision to which I have come! I repeat, therefore, that not one single sacrifice did you yourself offer to make. All on your part was selfishness—aye, intense selfishness: and on my mother's too! Yes—egotism was at the bottom of the conduct of both. That ye might maintain your state and dignity, your son was led week after week and month after month, to pledge his birthright in detail—to make away with it parcel by parcel—to sell himself by degrees to the black demon of Ruin, as a man

in desperation sells period after period of his life to Satan ! No—not a single sacrifice on your part !—but I am to make ten thousand ! And now you think to render this hideous marriage the crowning one of all ? But it shall not be !”

“Walter, you asked me to listen to you,” replied Lord Ravenshill, in a tremulous and almost broken voice: “and I have done. But now hear me. Yes—I confess that I have been guilty of some wrongs towards you ; and, thank heaven ! we are thus speaking in the dark, so that a father may be saved the painful humiliation of having to blush in the presence of his son. But still you have viewed my conduct in the severest light, and have painted in the blackest colour. You have gone too far. Think you that if your mother and myself sought to sustain a certain position, it was for ourselves alone ? No—it was still more for you. Oh ! can you not imagine that your poor mother and myself have passed many and many a sleepless night—have endured many and many an hour of poignant agony—when we have been compelled to envisage the difficulties of our position ? But our hope still was that you—with your handsome person, your fine intellect, your courtly manners, and the proud name you were destined at my death, to bear, would amend all by a brilliant alliance.”

“And *this*,” ejaculated Walter, in thrilling tones of bitterest scorn and keenest irony,—“*this* is the brilliant alliance you have found for me—Boustead’s daughter !”

Here the young man sent forth a loud and mocking laugh, which rang with the horrible sardonism of a very fiend. It was a laugh such as in the extreme of despair would be wrung from a breaking

heart in defiance of a threat holding out the infliction of some fresh misfortune: it was indeed one of those laughs which grate along all the nerves, make the blood run cold in the veins, and cause the soul to shudder at the frightful potency of passion whereof the human mind is capable.

“Walter, you will drive me mad !” exclaimed Lord Ravenshill: and I heard his foot stamp upon the frozen pathway.

“Drive you mad ?” cried Walter, in that same tone of bitterest irony. “I am mad already ! Now, father, it is useless for us to remain in conversation here. My resolve is taken, and you know what it is.”

“Then, listen, Walter !” rejoined the nobleman: and for a few instants there was a solemn pause, which was broken by his lordship’s voice sounding, deep and hollow in its accents, as he said, “Adhere to your resolve, if you will: but mistake not the warning I am about to give. You will be the murderer of your father !”

An ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Walter Ravenshill.

“Yes,” the nobleman went on to say: “do not mistake me ! Within the very same hour that the bailiffs take possession of Charlton Hall, do I put a period to my existence. Now, Walter, have you the course—have you the heartlessness to drive me to this horrible catastrophe ?”

“No, my God—no !” exclaimed the wretched young man, in accents of wildest anguish, but no longer fraught with irony nor sardonism: “not for worlds would I do this ! But is there no way, father, of extricating ourselves from this web of difficulties which is closing in around us, save by

the consummation of that hated alliance?"

"None, Walter," was the response,—"unless another and a better bride could be found, with a quarter of a million as a dower, and another quarter of a million in the perspective: for this is the wealth which Boustead's daughter will bring."

"Another bride?" said Walter, slowly and musingly repeating his father's words: then with a sudden outburst of excitement, he cried, "Oh, that I had but a few months' respite!—oh, that I had but another chance of rendering myself acceptable to some wealthy damsel whose appearance, whose manners, and whose family would not disgrace us! Father," continued Mr. Ravenshill, his voice suddenly sinking into the more subdued tone of deliberate seriousness, "there is a matrimonial field which I have left unexplored. If the daughters of the aristocracy be for the most part portionless—those of bankers, merchants, and wealthy London citizens are not so. Some of these families are as well brought up and almost as refined as those of the sphere to which we belong—"

"True, Walter!" ejaculated Lord Ravenshill, as if pleased with the idea thus suggested.

"Ah! you consent that I shall essay this one chance of delivering myself from the necessity of marrying Boustead's daughter? Look you, father," continued Walter; "my proceedings are plain and easy. I return to London without breaking off the present engagement: if within a few months I form an alliance better suited to my tastes, and equally eligible in a pecuniary sense, we shall be satisfied—nay, more, we shall be happy. But if I fail, then must I adopt the alternative of espousing

Boustead's daughter; and in the meantime I shall at least have sufficient leisure to reflect upon what may be my probable destiny, and thus be enabled to meet it with more courage than I can now display. Do you approve of my plan, father?—and do you not think that you can make sufficient excuses to the Bousteads to postpone the wedding-day for a few months, as well as to account for my absence during the interval, in such a manner that they may not suspect what is going on?"

"All this would be easy enough," replied Lord Ravenshill, "if the creditors themselves would wait. They are anxiously looking forward for next month, when it is presumed the nuptials are to take place."

"I can suggest a plan!" eagerly interrupted Walter. "Let a paragraph be inserted in the county newspapers to the effect that the nuptials of the Hon. Walter Ravenshill with the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Titus Boustead, Esq., the eminent contractor, are postponed until the first week of August, in consequence of a death in the family of Lord Ravenshill." Let such a paragraph, I say be inserted: the vanity of the Bousteads will be tickled by it—the creditors will have patience. They will say to themselves that the marriage is really to take place; and that in respect to their claims it is a mere matter of time, with the certainty of eventual settlement. Cannot all this be done, dear father?"

The contrast between the tone which Walter Ravenshill was now adopting towards his sire, and that which but a little time back he had been using, was very marked and striking—it being evident that he in his turn was now calling cajolery to his aid in

order to obtain his ends. I heard Lord Ravenshill give his assent to all the details of the scheme suggested by Walter: and then they walked away together, still farther discussing the proposed arrangements as they leisurely retraced their steps to the house.

I then emerged from my place of concealment; and hurrying up to my own chamber, retired to rest. But it was long ere sleep visited my eyes: my mind was tossed upon the agitated sea of varied thoughts,—in which the image of Annabel, the disgraceful conduct of Mrs. Boustead, and the discreditable machinations of Lord Ravenshill and his son were blended and jumbled together.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A DEVONSHIRE SUPERSTITION.

ON the second morning after that discourse which I had overheard, the Hon. Mr. Walter Ravenshill took his departure for London, attended by his valet Charles Linton; and it was rumoured at the Hall and in the neighbourhood, that a very distant relative of the Ravenshill family—from whom the family itself entertained some pecuniary expectations—had just died in the metropolis. But his lordship hinted to one of his valets, and her ladyship to her maids, that this deceased relation was of too remote a kinship to render it necessary for the family to go into mourning: and thus the falsehood being told, an equally deceptive pretext was rendered necessary for the avoidance of what would have been a most impious mockery. Little did Lord and Lady Ravenshill think that there was one beneath their roof

who could have unmasked their hypocrisy if he had chosen: but it was not my business to say a word,—the more especially as I had only become possessed of the secret by an accident which, if I opened my lips, might be construed into a wilful and impudent eaves-dropping.

I must now remark that the seat of Sir Malcolm Wavenham was about three miles distant from the Hall, and only one mile beyond the little village of Charlton itself. In the course of a few days after the incidents just related, I overheard some of the servants talking about Sir Malcolm; and I thus discovered that he was for the present staying in Exeter with her who was denominated Violet Mortimer. Exeter, as already stated, was about twenty miles from the Hall; and thus, even if I still entertained the idea of making another attempt to see the Baronet's victim, and persuade her to abandon the path of frailty,—the distance would have precluded the execution of the design. I did not however harbour the project: I said to myself that if Annabel was weak and criminal enough thus to yield to temptation, no words which I might utter would endow her with strength or re-imbue her with the virtue sufficient to emancipate herself from the ways of transgression. Moreover, I should have dreaded to meet, under such circumstances, the being whom I had known in her purity, and whom my boyish heart had learnt to love so fondly. I therefore resigned myself, as well as I was able to the weight of my sorrow; and endeavoured to the best of my ability to banish Annabel's image from my thoughts—but, alas! this was not so easy.

Weeks went by—they grew into months—the trees began putting forth their verdure again

the singing of birds joyously proclaiming the presence of Spring. The primrose grew upon the banks—the violet veiled her more modest beauties under the green hedges. All this while the Hon. Mr. Walter Ravenshill remained absent: the Bousteads continued to visit at the Hall: not a whisper circulated as to the possibility or probability of the match being broken off; and the creditors continued patient as well as obliging. Often and often did I think of visiting Charlton again, in order to pay my respects to Miss Delmar: but feeling how much she must be afflicted, I dreaded to show myself in her presence. As for the amount of success which Mr. Ravenshill was experiencing in the metropolis with regard to his matrimonial researches, I had no means of obtaining any information, even if I were curious on the point,—my friend Charles Linton being absent with his master. Thus time wore on—and the month of June arrived.

One forenoon, I was rambling by myself during a leisure hour or two along the bank of the stream, when I suddenly heard the sound of voices speaking loudly and in a very excited manner. They evidently came from some little distance a-head of where I was walking at the time; and a group of trees, growing on the bank—their overhanging boughs dipping in the crystal waters—concealed from view the persons whose voices thus reached my ears. Judging however by the excited accents that something unusual was taking place—and even fearing, as the voices swelled into cries, that it was an accident of a serious character—I sped along, scrambling through the trees and the underwood. The instant that I emerged on the other side, I beheld a scene which I shall not readily forget.

Five or six labouring men were dragging forth a corpse from the stream, which was exceedingly deep and ran very rapid in that part of the estate. The corpse was that of a young labourer whom I knew well by sight, and had often seen passing through the grounds. His name was Benjamin Cowper: and he lived with his parents in the village of Charlton. His father—an old man of past sixty—was amongst those whom thus descried upon the bank; and when the corpse was drawn forth, the bereaved parent flung himself upon it with such heart-rending lamentations that the tears, bursting from my eyes, blinded me for a few moments. The unfortunate young man was dressed in all his clothes; and therefore I at once concluded that he must have fallen in by accident, and being unable to swim, was drowned—unless, indeed, it were an act of suicide: but, as I subsequently ascertained, for this belief there was not the slightest ground. It was within half a mile of the village that the dreadful discovery was made; and I learnt the following facts from one of those who had just dragged forth the corpse.

It appeared that on the preceding evening. Benjamin Cowper did not return home at his usual hour, from labour, and this was considered the more extraordinary, inasmuch as he was very regular in his habits, an exceeding steady young man, and had made a particular appointment with a young woman, named Catherine Allen, to take her out for a walk. The young couple were engaged to each other; and it was at the cottage of Benjamin's parents that she was waiting for him. As hour after hour passed—night came—and he returned not, the most serious apprehensions were entertained. He was sought for

in the village alehouse, though but little accustomed to cross its threshold : but he was not there—neither had he visited it. Hurried calls were made at the neighbours' abodes : but all in vain. The Rev. Mr. Howard, learning of this mysterious disappearance, went out with several of the villagers to search amidst the adjacent fields—thinking that possibly the missing one might have fallen down in a fit. Far into the night was the search protracted—but all in vain : the anguish of the parents and poor Catherine continued unrelieved. In the morning the search was resumed : the villagers divided themselves into scouring parties for the purpose—the missing young man's father accompanying one of the bands. It was this particular party which—while passing along the bank of the stream, where, as before said, it was wider, deeper, and more rapid than elsewhere—beheld the corpse lying on the pebbly bed at the bottom. Thus did I arrive upon the spot at the very instant the unfortunate young man was dragged forth.

Never shall I forget the anguish of that bereaved father ! It displayed itself not merely in the bitterest lamentations, but also with a pathos which would have moved the hardest heart. But now the deep and touching interest of this tragic scene was to experience a new phase, and to develop fresh feature of indescribable woe. Two females who had followed this searching party, came up to the spot :—frantically flying hither did they come, having seen from a distance enough of the ominous proceedings to make them suspect what had occurred. One of these women was the drowned man's mother : the other his betrothed Catherine. The latter was a fine tall,

stout, buxom girl—and might even be pronounced handsome. She was not above eighteen ; and as I subsequently learnt, was naturally of the gayest and liveliest disposition in the village—full of exuberant spirits—but of a purity of conduct which never had afforded the slightest scope for the malignity of scandal. She was a good young woman—an orphan, living with an old aunt, who kept a small shop, and whom Catherine industriously assisted in the little household and business.

The two poor women—mother and betrothed—threw themselves upon the dead body of the loved and lost one with an anguish and an agony as great as that which the father had experienced—and was indeed still experiencing. Again did the tears trickle down my cheeks as I contemplated that scene ; and I believe that amongst the assembled villagers not an eye-lash was dry. But I was presently struck by bitter self accusations that mingled with the lamentations which the unfortunate Catherine sent forth.

“ Oh, it was my fault ! ” she wildly cried : it is a judgment of heaven upon me for my wickedness ! Oh, the impious folly of which I was guilty !—oh, the sinful attempt to penetrate the future ! It was my fault ! I have provoked heaven’s wrath !—it is done to punish me—and for that purpose he is made the victim ! Wretched, wretched creature that I am ! ”

The kind-hearted villagers gathered around the almost frenzied girl ; and in their own rude but well-meaning manner said what they could to console her. Afflicted as I myself was with this heart-rending scene, I could not help observing that Catherine’s passionate self-accusings produced no surprise upon these

men—but that, on the contrary, they appeared fully to comprehend what she meant: for they exchanged gloomy and significant looks amongst themselves,—shaking their heads solemnly, too, in mournful as well as awful corroboration of the poor girl's words.

"Alas, alas, Katy!" said the bereaved mother, in a broken voice and amidst torrents of tears, "that you should have done that! Oh, fatal Midsummer's Eve! My poor boy is gone—the life is out of him! But we will not reproach you, Katy—we all know how you loved him——"

Here her voice was choked with sobs: and for some minutes not another intelligible word was spoken by either of the three mourners: they mingled their tears, their convulsing grief, and their agonizing moans. At length, these first paroxysms of ineffable agony having somewhat subsided, the villagers gently but firmly drew the father, the mother, and Kate Allen away from the corpse,—over the countenance of which one of them threw his garment. Then the mournful procession towards the village was formed: but I could not endure the spectacle any longer—I had already seen enough to cause my heart to ache for a long time to come. I turned away; and retracing my steps with a profound melancholy in my soul, took the nearest path to the Hall,—avoiding the bank of the stream with a kind of vague and ominous dread of those crystal waters which were so deep and rapid there. At a short distance from the spot where the scene had taken place, I sat down on the step of a stile to compose my feelings, if possible, before I returned to the house. I fell into such a train of melancholy reflection that I observed not how

time was passing—and must have tarried there at least an hour, not having the energy to rise up and continue my way. I was aroused from that painful dreaminess of thought by the sounds of footsteps approaching along the path-way leading from the village. I rose up—and beheld one of the labouring men who had assisted to drag forth the corpse.

"It's a sad, sad thing," he said, with the gloomist sorrow depicted upon his honest sunburnt countenance: and he himself was a young good-looking man, somewhat resembling his drowned comrade, "Such woe and tribulation as there is in the village! I could endure the sight no longer and was forced to come away. Ah! it's a pity that Kate should ever have done what she did!—but she'll never again be the gay and happy being she was. If this isn't the death of her at once, she'll pine away slowly and sink down by degrees into the grave."

"It was indeed a most melancholy spectacle," I observed: then, after a pause, I said, with some little degree of hesitation—for the subject appeared too painful a one to be prolonged for the mere gratification of curiosity,— "What meant those bitter self-accusings of the poor girl? and why did you just now say that it were better if she had not done it?"

"Ah! it is a sad history altogether," responded the man: "but I'll explain what you want to know."

He seated himself on the stile, and I resumed my place upon the step; then, after an interval of mournful reflection, he related in his own peculiar dialect the following extraordinary narrative, which I do not however attempt to give in that provincial phraseology.

"Last Midsummer's Eve there

was a goodly party of us assembled at the Cowper's cottage: for it was the old man's sixty-fourth birthday: and Mr. Howard—that's our minister, you know—had sent him the wherewithal to make merry. Kate was of course there; and with her joyous spirits and her innocent mirth, she seemed the life and soul of the little party. We had a good supper—I think there were altogether ten or a dozen of us; and the cup went round often enough to make us cheerful, without doing us any harm. Well, it was a little past eleven o'clock—and I don't know how the conversation took a turn, or who was the first that broached the subject—but I remember well that we found ourselves talking about fairies, and pixies, and all the little elfin people that are supposed to haunt certain spots. Some expressed their belief in the existence of these beings: others ridiculed the notion—and amongst these was Ben Cowper himself. But no one spoke more emphatically in this latter sense, than did Kate Allen. She laughed outright at the idea of putting faith in those things—and declared that she never was superstitious, and never could be. Her lover echoed all her sentiments: and the subject was argued amongst us in a manner that deepened into seriousness, but in perfect good feelings; for wherever Kate was, it was impossible to lose one's temper. Gradually the discourse turned upon spectres, apparitions, and ghosts; several tales were told of remarkable occurrences in connexion therewith: but here again Kate Allen and Ben Cowper were altogether incredulous. They vowed that the circumstances detailed were mere coincidences, or else the effects of imagination. This point was likewise argued with increasing seriousness, and

still in a friendly spirit. One person present observed that he would not for worlds walk through the churchyard at midnight; whereupon Kate replied that she would not hesitate to do so: but she did not say it in a vain-glorious or improperly boastful manner—it was the genuine expression of a courageous mind. Another of the party suddenly remarked that it was Midsummer's Eve; and this observation reminded us all of a particular belief associated with that night. This is to the effect that if any one at midnight, on the eve of Midsummer Day, looks into a church, he will see those persons who, being known to him, are destined to die in the ensuing twelve months, walk slowly through the interior of the building. This superstition, which very generally prevails in Devonshire—and I believe in other parts of England—was repudiated by Kate Allen and her lover as energetically as the previously discussed questions; and as the greater number of those present were firm believers on the point, Kate offered to repair to the church, look through one of the windows as the clock was striking twelve, and thus convince us that there was no ground for the superstition. We were all so much interested in the matter, that as far as I can recollect, very few remonstrances were offered; and Kate accordingly set out. Before she left the cottage—which is within a stone's throw of the churchyard—she proposed that two or three of us should follow at a distance and assure ourselves that she did not shrink from the performance of what she had volunteered: but we knew that we could take her word—and so we decided on remaining where we were."

Here the narrator of this

episode paused for a few minutes: and I awaited with intense curiosity and interest the continuation of the story. Speaking in a tone of increased solemnity, he resumed his tale as follows:—

“Kate went forth. It was a beautiful night—the stars were shining brightly—and one could almost see to read in the open air. From the cottage window the old church might be viewed with its ivy-covered tower: but the wall bordering the churchyard being high, we could not see Kate making her way amidst the tombstones. After she had left us, the conversation ceased—a certain feeling of solemn awe came over most of us—and I believe that several present felt sorry that the young damsel had been suffered to proceed upon her enterprise. Such was not, however, the sentiment of her lover, Ben Cowper, who, on the contrary, was proud of his betrothed’s courage: but it was the feeling of his parents—and I know that it was also mine. About ten minutes after Kate left us, the church-clock began to proclaim the hour of midnight. We sat silent, some of us exchanging significant glances, which methought were sombre and gloomy. Another ten minutes passed by; and then we beheld Kate issuing forth from the churchyard and approaching the cottage. Ben Cowper and myself were gazing from the window; and it struck me that instead of walking with her usual airy and lightly tripping pace, she advanced slowly and with a certain appearance of solemnity. As she passed by the window too, methought her face was pale; and when she entered the room, all eyes were at once centred upon her. She was pale, and evidently troubled—although she strove to conceal her feelings. Her first words were, “Did any-

body play me trick? who left the room during my absence?—and she spoke with tremulous accents. The question she thus put caused great excitement and suspense, not even excepting Ben; for we all felt assured that something had really happened. Old Mr. Cowper, speaking for the rest, positively declared that no one had left the cottage while she was away. Her eyes settled upon Ben in a searching manner: he repeated his father’s assurance—and poor Kate, no longer able to restrain her feelings, sank down upon a chair, bursting into tears. We were all very much afflicted by this spectacle; and the girl’s lover, now reproaching himself bitterly for having allowed her to go to the church, conjured her in the most affectionate manner to conquer her emotions. Repeating an argument on which she herself had so much insisted when the subject of ghosts was previously discussed, he said that whatever had happened could only have been fancy on her part. Suddenly wiping away the tears, Kate appeared to grow calm; but several minutes elapsed before she would explain the cause of her previous excitement. Then, what she did say was in a few words, amounting only to this:—‘that as she looked through the church-window, she saw the form of a man pass close by that window, but within the church; and that she did not recognise his face.’ No one pressed her for any further explanations: though we saw plainly that she had not told *all*—and we were at no loss to conjecture what it was she had left unsaid. The party broke up gloomy and out of spirits: and we withdrew to our respective homes. For some weeks I thought that Kate Allen was not the same smiling light-hearted girl she used to be; but by degrees this

impression on my mind wore off—she recovered her wonted spirits—and the incident, which at first had made some little stir in the village, ceased to be spoken of. One day,—it must have been about three months ago—I and Ben Cowper had work to do in the same field; and while talking together, the occurrence I have been relating was somehow or another revived. He then told me that it was five or six weeks after Midsummer's Eve before he could get out of Kate what she really had seen on that particular night: but at length she had yielded to his entreaties and given the fullest explanations. What she said was that she *did* recognise the countenance of the figure that passed the window inside the church; for that while so passing, it turned its face towards her—and that face was as pale as the dead! It was the face of Ben Cowper himself. But at the time that Kate thus completed her narrative to her lover, she said that having since reflected upon the incident, she felt assured it was only her fancy; and she moreover confessed that on passing through the churchyard—finding herself amongst the tombstones and the green graves—then hearing the solemn striking of the clock—and looking into the church, the very gloom of which was displayed by the star-light pouring in,—she was seized with a superstitious awe which but a few minutes previously she had little imagined herself to be capable of experiencing. It was therefore, she thought, that under this influence her imagination had conjured up before her the being who was oftenest in her mind, and concerning whose welfare she was naturally so solicitous. Such were the explanations which she gave to Ben Cowper

soon after the occurrence, and which he recited to me three months ago. He himself entertained exactly the same view of the matter as Kate did,—attributing it all to her fancy; and therefore the incident did not trouble him in the least: for he never had been inclined to superstition. I can't say that I was equally well satisfied upon the point: but of course I pretended to be—as I would not for the world frighten either Ben Cowper or Kate Allen by seeming to attach any importance to the affair. When last night I heard that Ben was missing, the thought flashed to my mind in a moment that something was wrong, and that Kate would have to pay too dear, poor girl! for her freak of last Midsummer's Eve. So it has proved; and I don't think she will ever get over it."

When the man had ceased speaking, I sat pondering for several minutes upon the extraordinary tale he had related. I myself was far from being superstitious. Mr and Mrs. Nelson, at the school where I was brought up, had always discouraged such a tendency on the part of the pupils—and had frequently laboured to prove that there were no such things as spectral visitations from the dead, nor warnings of a preternatural character. I therefore concluded that it was in reality only the effect of an excited imagination on Kate Allen's part; though the accidental death of her lover within the year might seem to give it a more awfully solemn complexion. Besides, I thought to myself that whether Kate had gone to the church or not, this same fatal accident would have occurred all the same, whatsoever cause had produced it: and that it would be questioning the justice of heaven to suppose that the decree for the young man's premature death

had gone forth as a punishment for any act of thoughtless impiety or daring levity on the part of his betrothed.

"Is it surmised," I asked, at length breaking silence, "how the poor young man came to be drowned?"

"Yes," was the labourer's response. "Ben was in the habit of setting lines to catch eels; and the knowledge that he did so, made me and my comrades just now follow the bank of the stream when we were on the search. It is to be supposed that Ben, on his way home last evening, tarried to lay his lines, and fell in: but whether his foot slipped, or whether he was seized with a fit, can never be known. Poor fellow! it is a sad affair—a very sad affair."

With these words, the kind-hearted peasant wished me "good-day," and struck across the fields—while I pursued the path leading back to Charlton Hall. On reaching the house, I told my fellow-servants all that had happened; and the tragic circumstances furnished ample food for conversation, not merely during the rest of that day, but several days to come.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### MIDSUMMER'S EVE.

THE lamentable incident produced a great impression upon my mind; and I could not help very frequently meditating upon it. I reviewed all the arguments which my ingenuity suggested, to prove that the spectral apparition in the church was mere fancy on Kate Allen's part, and that her lover's death within the year was to be accounted for as those singular occurrences

which, while appearing to be the fulfilment of a previous warning, in reality belong only to the chapter of accidents. But there was nevertheless within my mind a certain uneasy and superstitious doubt as to the validity of those arguments. The domestics were allowed access to certain shelves of books in his lordship's library: and I searched amongst the volumes for any works which I could find treating of supernatural appearances. I discovered several; and the longer I read, the greater was the avidity with which I devoured their contents. I was astonished at the seeming authentication of several of the narratives which I thus perused: I had never before imagined that there were any accounts of that nature which appeared to be so genuine. For instance, revelations made by the spirits of the departed to their survivors in his life had proved the means of wills being discovered—had led to lawsuits—and had come under the cognizance of legal tribunals: while the persons seeking to benefit themselves by these appeals to justice could not possibly have obtained the information on which the suits were brought, save and except by preternatural revealings. I found, moreover, that the idea of apparitions being seen only at night, and never by more than one person at a time, was a mere vulgar error—that is to say, if the accounts in these books could be relied upon: for here were numerous instances of spiritual types of departed persons being seen in the broad daylight and by several individuals assembled. In short, the volumes which I thus greedily devoured—staggered, bewildered, and amazed me. I did not like to admit, even to myself, a complete concession to the mass of evidence contained therein: but yet I did

not see how it could reasonably be rejected.

I am not ashamed to admit that for the time being I was not merely staggered by that course of reading into which I thus plunged—but I was more or less unnerved by it. When I retired to my chamber at night, the least unusual noise before the candle was put out would make me start and glance around with a vague dread of beholding something terrible: and when stretched in bed, and with the light extinguished, I was a long time before I could get to sleep, every now and then opening my eyes with the shuddering fear of beholding a white face looking in at me through the curtains. My mind was thus to a certain extent fevered—my imagination rendered morbid: vainly did I wrestle against the superstitious belief which was gradually obtaining a firmer hold upon me—I felt that my thoughts in this respect had all become changed under the influence of the books I had been reading. Deeply did I regret that I ever read them at all; and every night on seeking my chamber, I vowed that I would not return to them. But on the following day an irresistible feeling of morbid curiosity led me back to the same study; and when I could find no fresh works of the same character to peruse, I re-read the most remarkable narratives in those which had already gained my attention. Thus a belief in preternatural warnings and spiritual apparitions was taking a strong hold upon my mind.

It will be remembered that the tragic occurrence which has occupied the preceding chapter took place at the commencement of June. Three weeks passed away; and as the incidents I have next to record must be particularized as to date, it is necessary to ob-

serve that it was the 23rd of June whereof I am about to write. On that day a rural festival was given by the Bousteads, at which Lord and Lady Ravenshill had promised to be present, they still keeping up their intimacy with Euphemia's parents a circumstance, by the bye, from which I argued that Mr. Walter's search after a rich wife in the metropolis was not progressing as favourably as he could wish. On this particular day, however, of which I am speaking, my lord and her ladyship proceeded at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon to the Bousteads' residence: and it was therefore a sort of holiday for the greater number of the servants. I had nothing particular to do; and having for the past three weeks spent all my leisure time in reading, I resolved to recreate myself with a good walk. I really felt that I required it; for my spirits were desponding—my natural gaiety had left me: I was a prey to gloomy thoughts by day, and to superstitious fears by night.

It was about noon when I issued forth by myself; and after a little reflection, I determined to stroll across to Charlton. I had two objects in this proceeding: one was to inquire how poor Kate Allen bore her dreadful loss—the other was to ascertain if Miss Delmar was still in that village. For I now thought that I might pay my respects to her, if she were: I felt that it would do me good in one sense to see that dear kind young lady again—though in another it might wound my heart by the spectacle of her affliction. Nevertheless, I naturally argued that the bitterness of her woe must have experienced some mitigation during the many months which had now elapsed since the murder of Mr. Delmar; and at all events I considered

to see Edith was a duty which ought no longer to be delayed. True, it was but a humble liveried page who entertained this idea, which may look like presumption: but I experienced the liveliest gratitude towards that young lady, and was anxious to prove it.

I accordingly walked across to Charlton. It would be impossible to conceive a more sweetly picturesque village than this appears in the summer time—almost completely embowered as it is in emerald verdure. The cottages, though of humblest aspect, look not merely neat, but cheerful with the jasmine and roses climbing over their porticoes, and the clematis shading the little lattice windows:—the stream, flowing through the village, and becoming broader the nearer it draws to its point of confluence with the river, adds to the beauty of the landscape; and the old-fashioned water-mill, with its comfortable homestead adjoining, constitutes a feature which an artist would be careful not to omit. On entering the village I first repaired to the churchyard, which indeed was in my way; and there I lingered for some little time, reading the quaint epitaphs, alike in prose, and verse, which did more honour to the hearts than to the heads of the mourners who had caused them to be inscribed upon the stones marking the resting-places of the loved and lost ones. Presently a grave which had been recently filled up arrested my attention; and though no stone was as yet placed there as an index of who slept beneath, I nevertheless felt assured that the newly-arranged turfs covered the remains of the unfortunate Benjamin Cowper. While I was still regarding that grave, I heard the gate of the churchyard creak on its hinges:

and glancing in that direction, I beheld a young female in deep mourning enter the enclosure. It was Catherine Allen: I recognized her at once—But, good heavens, how altered! On the day that I saw her for the first time, three weeks back, she was a fine stout damsel: and though I had beheld her under the utmost disadvantage—convulsed with grief over the corpse of her lover—yet it was *then* by no means difficult to estimate the amount of her personal attractions when in her wonted mood of cheerfulness. But, alas! that cheerfulness was gone, never to return: her beauty was blighted—the colour had forsaken her cheeks—she looked as if she had passed through the anguished sufferings of years, so great a wreck had three short weeks made of this recently blithe and buxom creature!

She advanced with the slow pace of a mourner: full well I knew that she was approaching the grave wherein all her earthly hopes of happiness were interred; and from a feeling of respect for the sanctity of a grief which might not be intruded upon, I hastened to a little distance. She did not see me; or if she did, paid no particular attention to my presence within the enclosure appropriated to the dead. I could not help lingering for a few minutes to observe her. For a short while she stood motionless as a statue by the side of the grave—her eyes bent down upon it, and her hands joined in a drooping manner before her: then, all of a sudden, a sob burst forth, so loud in its convulsing anguish that it reached my ears:—and falling on her knees, she threw herself over the grave, giving vent to the most passionate lamentations. My first impulse was to hasten and raise her up: but then recurred

the thought that hers was a grief of a sanctity not to be intruded upon ; and this idea held me back. I issued from the churchyard by the opposite gate from that through which she had entered ; and wiped the tears from my face as I passed on into the village. I had no need *now* to inquire how Kate Alien bore her loss : my eyes and ears had furnished me with evidence—alas ! too painful—that it was beyond endurance.

I made my way to the parsonage, which was in the close vicinage of the church, and which stood in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. A female-servant was issuing forth at the instant that I reached the gate ; and as she wore a half-mourning dress, I judged that she belonged to the establishment of the Rev. Mr. Howard. I accordingly inquired whether Miss Delmar was residing there ?

"Oh, no," she answered : "the poor dear young lady has gone for the benefit of her health to the sea-side. She went three months ago, accompanied by her aunt, Mrs. Howard."

"Mr. Howard's mother, I presume ?"

"Yes—and a kind good lady she is," responded the servant-girl : then observing the crest on my buttons, she said, "Do you bring any letter or message from the Hall for Miss Delmar ?"

"No," I answered ; and I knew not exactly what excuse to make for having inquired after her : but feeling that it was necessary to say something, I observed, "I merely wished to ask concerning the young lady's health : for I was once in service in London, and saw her two or three times."

With these words I turned somewhat abruptly and hurried away : I was so fearful of committing myself to anything which might travel elsewhere, and by

reaching the metropolis find its way to Mr. Lanover's ears. But when I was at a little distance, I regretted not having asked more particularly how Miss Delmar bore up against her calamity. Alas ! it was scarcely necessary to do this : for the little intelligence I had received made me but too painfully aware that her health was broken—and therefore the bitterness of her affliction must have been keen indeed. I passed through the village ; and on gaining the outskirt, was about to turn into the field to retrace my way to the Hall,—when I heard the rapid trappings of horses' feet ; and round a bend in the road, each side of which was skirted by trees, there came a gentleman and lady mounted on splendid steeds, with a groom in a handsome livery following at a short interval. I stood aside to observe them ; and as they dashed to me, the name of "Annabel" was ejaculated from my lips. Whether she observed me I knew not : but certain it is that she did not seem to do so ;—and as the party were riding at a rapid pace, they speedily disappeared from my view.

I stood there, upon that spot, continuing to gaze in the direction which they had taken, long after they were out of sight : it seemed as if the images a dream had swept by. But who was her companion ? Sir Malcolm Wavenham ; and he was addressing her in loud and joyous tones at the moment they passed. For a few instants only was she within the range of my vision ; but the impression left behind was as strong and as vivid as if I had thus contemplated her for an hour. How beautiful did she appear in her long flowing riding-habit which set off the symmetry of her slender shape to all the advantage of its graceful lithe-

ness and its elegant proportions! How the riding-hat, with the floating veil, became her! And that veil covered not her countenance at the time, but waved upon the current of air which the rapidity of her course created,—thus revealing that angelic face which appeared at the moment lighted up with an animated pleasure amounting almost to radiance. It was such an expression that I had never seen upon the features of Annabel when beneath her father's roof: for there, when she smiled, it was always with that sweet pensiveness and softly ingenuous melancholy which methought inseparable from her countenance. Oh! again did I feel my heart bleeding at the idea that she was happy in her shame and her transgression!—for much rather would I have seen the tears of contrition trickling down those lovely cheeks than the flush of joy mantling upon them. And, Oh! methought likewise that I had done well not to renew my attempt to see her six months back, after the cruel rebuff I experienced at the theatre, when she sent out that message to the effect that she knew me not. As I wended my way across the fields, I wept in bitterest anguish: the keenness of my affliction on Annabel's behalf was all revived again; and I felt that I would rather have known she was dead than beheld her radiant with joy in the midst of her wanton shame. But what had become of her poor mother?—this was the question which over and over again did I ask myself.

I returned to the Hall; and seeking my own chamber, sat down to pursue my reflections. The visit to the churchyard and the presence of the unhappy Kate Allen at the grave of her dead lover, gave an impulse to those

superstitious meditations in which I had latterly fallen; and they now blended strangely with the other thoughts which the spectacle of the riding-party had conjured up. All were melancholy enough; and the longer I gave way to them, the more morbid became my mind. The hours passed—evening began to close in: I sought the servants' hall in the hope of escaping somewhat from the unpleasant reflections that were pursuing me—but I could not: and returning to my chamber, I mechanically took up one of those volumes which had latterly so much engrossed my attention. There I sat reading, by the dim light of an unsnuffed candle, until my brain was filled with superstitious thoughts. But I did not feel frightened now: I looked not around in terror: I glanced not over my shoulder to assure myself that no spectral shape was standing behind me. It seemed as if I had suddenly become calmly courageous, as the conviction deepened in my soul that all I had been reading was strictly true. Suddenly I recollect that this was Midsummer Eve. Just one year had elapsed since poor Kate Allen—then in the glow of her joyous spirits and in the bloom of her hoyden charms—had paid the visit to the churchyard; and within this year which had since elapsed, the warning she then received had been but too fatally fulfilled. Such were my reflections. I did not now seek to reason against the preternatural semblance of the tragedy: on the contrary, I believed it was strictly true in that respect. Solemn thoughts moved in my mind. A strange curiosity was springing up within me: the superstition connected with Midsummer's Eve appeared to blend with the circumstances

of Annabel. And now it struck me also as singular, that I should have seen her dashing past me in the radiance of her loveliness and in the very glory of her shame, so soon after I myself had been weeping bitter tears in a church-yard!

"Ah, Annabel! unfortunate Annabel!" I said apostrophizing her aloud: "what if you yourself could read the book of destiny? Full of life and spirits as you were this day, perhaps it is decreed that within the year which is to ensue, you also may be chill and inanimate in the grave!"

I know not how it was—I can only account for it by the exceeding morbid state of my mind at the time, as well as by the strange and unnatural manner in which various ideas and reflections, so really opposite in themselves, were jumbled and blended together; but certain it is that the words I had thus thrown out left behind an impression like a presentiment. It appeared as if I had received some instinctive revelation—some incomprehensible intuitive warning—that Annabel was really to perish within a twelvemonth. So strong did this idea become, that I could not possibly put it away from my mind. I rose from my seat—shut the volume I had been reading—and thought of retiring to rest: for I knew that it must be past ten o'clock. But there was upon me such a peculiar sensation, I knew I should not be able to sleep: strange longings too were inspiring me—a morbid curiosity had me in its spell-like power. Midsummer's Eve!—and this was the night on which that yearning curiosity could be gratified!

A feeling stronger than myself urged me to do what my thoughts were suggesting. It was easy for

me to steal forth unperceived from the house: no one would come to my chamber to ascertain whether I were there or not. I was not alarmed: had a spirit from the dead really arisen before me then, I do not think that I should have been frightened: I believe that I should have had the courage to question it calmly and firmly. I put on my hat—stole down the servants' staircase—and issued forth from the Hall. It was a lovely night: the heaven was studded with countless stars—the smallest print might have been read with facility: the very serenity of the heavens, with their unclouded azure, appeared to strengthen me in the purpose which I had in view. If I had seen black clouds—if the night were dark and gloomy, and Nature had threatened to speak forth in the thunder-voice of the storm, and to send her lightning glances gleaming vividly athwart the sky,—I should have been appalled—I should have shrunk back to my own chamber. But it was far otherwise: brightness, serenity, and silent loveliness filled the atmosphere. I proceeded across the fields: nearer and nearer I drew to the village of Charlton. I reached the stile where the peasant had told me the tale in connexion with the tragedy; and there I rested for a few minutes. My way was soon continued: there was a kind of serene awe in my soul: I was still resolute in the purpose which I had in hand. As I approached the village, no sound reached my ears:—all was still. It was close upon midnight: the ale-house was shut: not even a single straggler or belated individual was to be seen. I entered the churchyard; and though the tombstones gleamed glistantly white in the silvery effulgence poured down from heaven, they were

fraught with no terrors for me: nor did my imagination conjure up spectres from those graves which were thickly scattered around. I looked up at the clock, the dial of which plainly revealed its hands and its figures; and I saw that it wanted five minutes of midnight.

The church had a row of long, narrow-arched windows, set high up in the wall; and several small square ones so close down towards the ground as to enable even a young child to see through them into the church. I approached one of these, and gazed into the interior of the edifice. Through every one of the casements poured the starlight, so that scarcely any dark places were seen within. There were the ranges of pews, humbly fashioned as they are in small village churches—there was the pulpit against the wall facing the very window through which I looked: I could see the communion table at the extremity—the baptismal font in one of the aisels. Outside the church, the silence, though complete, appeared serene:—within, its reign seemed to be profoundly solemn.

"And now, for the first time since I had issued forth from the Hall, a sort of vague terror began to creep over me—a sensation of awe, not so much inspired by the graves of the dead surrounding the exterior of the church, as by the deep solemnity of the silence which appeared to prevail therein. That sensation of terror augmented; I felt my blood getting colder and colder, and appearing to stagnate more and more in my veins:—I wished that I had not come. Indeed, I was about to quit my post at the window,—when suddenly the first stroke of twelve smote my ear. Deep and solemn appeared to speak the metallic voice of Time:

its sounds sank down into my heart with the awe which is produced by the roar of the thunder. That iron din seemed to smite my very brain: I was transfixed to the spot; and with an irresistible fascination my eyes were fixed upon the window—or rather upon the interior of the church seen through it. Stroke after stroke clanged forth, becoming deeply and solemnly through the hitherto serene air, and raising echoes within the building which likewise met my ears. I counted those strokes—counted them mechanically: I was no longer the master of my own actions—I was under the influence of a spell-like feeling impossible to be described!

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve! And scarcely had the last stroke rung forth—still was the metallic sound vibrating in the air—when a female form clad in a light dress that seemed like the garment of the grave, appeared just within the casement as if passing slowly down the aisle on which that window looked. An ejaculation of terror burst from my lips—a face, white as that of the dead, was turned towards me—it was Annabel's—and with a louder and wilder cry I fell back senseless.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST VISIT OF THE BOUSTEADS.

WHEN I came to myself, I was lying in the churchyard, close by the window where I had fallen down,—the light of the moon and stars still flooding the atmosphere, playing upon the

graves, and throwing forth the tombstones in ghastly relief around me. Though the night air was warm, yet I felt cold as if the blood had all frozen in my veins: I was shuddering and shivering, too, with vague terrors and dreadful thoughts. The hand of death seemed to be upon me: the mementos and emblems of death met my wild glances in every direction as they were flung around: graves and tombstones—tombstones and graves—in uninterrupted succession! My looks were again turned towards that window where I had seen the pale white face of Annabel: but it was no longer there. Could it have been imagination on my part? was it the result of a fevered fancy morbidly excited at the time? Or was it a dread reality—a terrific presage of the untimely fate in store for that fair young creature?

I rose up from the ground—I leant against the wall of the church—I pressed my hands to my throbbing brows, and endeavoured to steady my ideas. I grew calmer;—not that I could fling off the dread superstitious impressions which either the real or the ideal sight of that face had left upon my mind; but I said to myself, “If it be the will of Providence that Annabel is to be taken away, it is doubtless for the wisest and the holiest of purpose—perhaps to save her from plunging still more deeply down into the vortex of guilt, and losing all her angel beauty in the pollutions of utter degradation. For myself, I know not whether I have committed a dread impiety in coming hither this night for the purpose of looking into the future: but I feel not as if I had committed a crime. If I have, sincere shall be my repentance.”

Having thus silently spoken within the depths of my own

heart, I moved away from the spot; and was retracing my steps through the churchyard, when I suddenly beheld a black object in human shape moving amongst the graves and the tombstones. I stopped short: again was I seized with a cold terror:—but as the shape became more distinctly visible, a suspicion of the truth flashed to my mind, fraught with a sensation of infinite relief. Keeping myself in the distance, and screened from view, I observed the direction which that afflicted creature took. For it was Kate Allen, apparelled in her mourning garb, visiting at that midnight hour the grave of her lover! How I longed to hasten forward and minister consolations to the afflicted being!—but hers was a grief beyond the reach of such solace, and likewise too holy to be intruded upon. Issuing forth from the churchyard, unperceived by her, I took the path homeward. My reflections during this walk were filled with a superstitious awe—a mysterious solemnity—the nature and depth of which I never can forget. The longer I meditated upon the sight that I had seen through the diamond-shaped panes of the church window, the less inclined was I to attribute it to a morbid imagination—but the more inclined to invest it with the terrible certainty of truth. At length I experienced some sort of relief in tears, as looking back for comparatively a few short months, I thought of Annabel as I had then known her—pure and chaste, etherealized with innocence, and having the prospect of a long life; and from this picture turned my mental vision upon her position now—so changed, so altered—alas, how much!—and with her days, perhaps her very hours numbered!

I succeeded in re-entering the

Hall and regaining my chamber without the slightest difficulty and without disturbing a soul. I feared, as I sought my couch, that I should not be enabled to sleep: but scarcely had my head touched the pillow, when slumber stole rapidly upon me; and when I awoke at about seven o'clock, I did not remember that my dreams had been disagreeable. But then, as the tremendous incident of midnight flashed back to my mind, I asked myself whether the whole were not a dream? whether I had quitted my chamber and visited the church at all? I closed my eyes again, and lay quite still to collect my thoughts. It appeared to me that it must have been a dream,—a dream in which the incidents were depicted with a startling vividness, and without that dimness and that shadowy mystification so generally hanging around the circumstances which fill the visions of the night. But, ah! were there not the means of clearing up all doubts at once? Yes: and leaping forth from the bed, I proceeded to examine my garments. They bore upon them the unmistakable evidences of having come in contact with the earth and the grass of the church-yard: they proved that I must indeed have lain upon the ground! It was impossible any longer to feel uncertain on the subject: It was no dream—it was a reality. But now I felt that I had done wrong to indulge the morbid feeling of curiosity which had led me to the church and put to the test the preternatural belief associating itself with the hour of midnight on Midsummer's Eve. I solemnly vowed that I would not again pore over those volumes of ghostly apparitions and superstitious warnings, which for three weeks past had been my study: for the conviction was strong in my mind that if I persisted in

such a course, my imagination would become gloomily diseased—my fancy morbidly desponding. And I a mere boy of just sixteen! —Oh, I was too young to fall into such a deplorable mental condition—a condition the bare idea of which sent a chill shuddering throughout my entire frame!

But did I need any farther proof that my visit to the churchyard was no dream? If so, this proof appeared to be furnished by a very lamentable and affecting piece of intelligence which reached the Hall in the course of the day. It was that poor Kate Allen had been found, at an early hour in the morning, stretched lifeless upon the grave of her deceased lover. She was completely cold when thus discovered by some labourers proceeding to their work; and it was evident that life had been extinct for some hours. Her heart had broken! Poor creature!—doubtless I was the last person who had seen her alive: but little did I suspect at the time that she was thus seeking the grave of her lover to render up her own existence on the turf so recently placed upon the spot where he slumbered in death! I was much affected when the sequel of that tragic episode thus reached my ears; but, for obvious reasons, I spoke not a word which might lead any of my fellow-servants to suppose that I had seen the unfortunate young woman in the last hour of her life.

Three weeks passed away: it was now the middle of July—and the rumour began to circulate amongst the domestics that the Hon. Walter Ravenshill was not, after all, going to marry Miss Boustead—but that he had proposed to the daughter of a wealthy London citizen, and was accepted by the young lady and her parents. It seemed that Charles Linton, having occasion to write

to the steward of his lordship's household at the Hall, had thus slightly glanced at these circumstances. A couple of days afterwards I myself received a letter from Charles,—in which he assured me that he had often thought of me during the five or six months he had now been absent—that he had frequently intended to drop me a few lines, but that something had always interfered to prevent him. He then proceeded to acquaint me that there was every prospect of the Hon. Mr. Walter becoming the husband of Miss Jenkinson, the only daughter of a retired merchant of the City of London. It was generally rumoured that Mr. Jenkinson would be enabled to give his daughter a dowry of three hundred thousand pounds, and that she would inherit as much more at his death. Charles described her as a good-looking and genteel young lady, of about twenty-one—well educated and accomplished—and therefore in every respect calculated to form a most excellent alliance for Mr. Walter. It farther appeared that the Jenkinson family dwelt in a palatial mansion in Piccadilly; and that if they were not received in the very highest circles they nevertheless moved in what might be termed “good society.” Charles concluded by observing that he had seen what was going on for some little time past, and how his young master was evidently paying his court to Miss Jenkinson; but that he had not deemed it prudent to write and communicate to his fellow-servants at the Hall anything of the matter. Now, however, as the engagement was formally announced to the friends of the Jenkinson family, there was no necessity to be any longer guarded on the subject.

Considering these words to con-

vey full authority to me to explain the contents of the letter to the other domestics, I did so; and the feeling of satisfaction amongst them was very general at the improved prospects of the Ravenshill family. The wages were all terribly in arrears: and until something decisive in respect to the immense liabilities of his lordship should be done, we all felt that the tenure of our places was somewhat precarious. For my part, however, I rejoiced through less selfish motives at the idea of Mr. Ravenshill making a better match than the one originally intended for him,—inasmuch as I, more than any other domestic of the household, was acquainted with the thorough horror and loathing with which he had regarded the prospect of conducting Euphemia Boustead to the altar. But now I wondered what the Bousteads would say or do when the startling intelligence should reach their ears that the Ravenshill had been playing them false and that Euphemia was to be jilted. I must not omit to add that I now observed that my lord and her ladyship appeared in better spirits than for some time past they had been. Not that they ever showed very visibly whatsoever cares were pressing upon their minds: for these sources of anxiety were for the most part veiled by their cold aristocratic pride and look of dignified reserve. Nevertheless it was apparent that they were now happier in their minds than heretofore; and observations to the same effect passed between his lordship's valets and her ladyship's maids when discoursing together in the servants' hall.

It was in the afternoon of the very same day on which I received the letter from Charles Linton that the glaring equipage of the Bousteads drove with its

accustomed rapidity up to the front door of the mansion. At that very moment Lord and Lady Ravenshill were about to issue forth together for a walk through the grounds; and as I was in the entrance-hall at the time, I thus accidentally became an observer of the scene which took place. The Bousteads—father, mother, and daughter—alighted from their carriage; and Mr. Boustead, in his loud coarse voice, exclaimed, “Well, my lud, we’ve come to take you by storm! We had nothing better to do to-day; and so we made up our minds, by way of desecration—”

“Recreation, pa!” was Miss Euphemia’s rebuking corrective.

“Well, my dear—*respiration* then,” proceeded Mr. Boustead. “And so, my lud, we mean to plant ourselves upon you for the rest of the day”

Mrs. Boustead laughed in her bassoon-like tones, as if she thought it a capital joke which familiar friends might play towards each other—namely, to come suddenly and uninvited to dinner: while Miss Boustead giggled and simpered as if she fully participated in the diverting character of the incident. Now, but a few weeks back—and perhaps even only a few days—Lord and Lady Ravenshill would have put the best possible face on the matter—would have forced themselves to laugh—and would have assured their “excellent friends” the Bousteads that they were most welcome: but the letters recently received from their son in London had evidently produced a marvellous alteration of circumstances. Lord Ravenshill drew himself up with the coldest aristocratic dignity: Lady Ravenshill stepped back, and acknowledged with a glacial reserve the forward and familiar advances of the Bousteads. I

believe that his lordship did unbend so far as just to permit Mr. Boustead to get possession of his forefinger instead of grasping the entire hand: but I am confident that Lady Ravenshill affected not to perceive that the hands of Mrs. Boustead and Euphemia were stretched out at all. It was impossible, with all their self-sufficiency, vanity, and conceit, that the Bousteads could avoid observing this marked and deliberate alteration in the demeanour of Lord and Lady Ravenshill. They *did* notice it: they were at once struck by it—and for a few instants all three stood transfixed, perfectly confounded.

“Why—what the dickens does this mean?” at length ejaculated Mr. Boustead. “I hope no offence, my lud?”

“Offence? Certainly not,” was his lordship’s response, delivered in the most chilling accents.

“Only her ladyship and I regret very much that we shall be unable to have the *honour*”—with a slight accentuation on the word—“to receive Mr., Mrs., and Miss Boustead to-day.”

“Come, come, my lud,” exclaimed the capitalist, “this is being rayther too stiff and formular;” —he meant formal; but the mistake passed this time uncorrected by his daughter.

“Mr. Boustead,” answered Lord Ravenshill, with immense and overwhelming dignity, “I allow no man to set myself up as the judge of my actions.”

Again did the Bousteads look completely confounded: it was evident to them that they had *not* mistaken the demeanour of Lord and Lady Ravenshill—but that it was studiously, deliberatly, intentionally cold.

“My lud,” said the capitalist, now suddenly assuming an insolent air of defiance, “I demand explanations. When friends

come in this promiscuous way, they had no ought to be treated with difference."

"I am not aware," responded the nobleman, "that Mr., Mrs., and Miss Boustead were ever entitled to consider themselves the friends of the family whereof I have the pride and the honour to be the head."

"Then, by Jove!" thundered forth Mr. Boustead, "we have been completely humbugged! I have been made an ass of: you my dear,"—speaking to his wife—"are a fool; and you, Phemy, are jilted!"

"Miss Boustead sent forth a piercing shriek, and immediately went off into hysterics,—from which however she recovered as rapidly;—for her father, shaking her roughly by the shoulder, while the mother held her in her arms, exclaimed in his coarse voice, "Come gal—none of this nonsense! Let's show that we are as good as them any day in the week. Why, what's a pauper broken-down lord, that hasn't got a guinea to bless himself with?"

"John," said Lord Ravenshill, turning with calm and stately dignity towards one of the footmen standing near; "kick this insolent plebian down the steps;"—but John, not exactly thinking his master was serious, contented himself with saying, "Yes, my lord," and only shuffled about on the spot where he stood.

"I'll be revenged for this!" thundered forth the capitalist, marching back to his carriage.

"And so you call yourself a lady?" cried Mrs. Boustead, throwing this taunt at my mistress. "In my opinion a lady is a lady which can keep up appearances as such."

"You may tell your coxcomb son that I never *could* bear him!" shrieked forth Euphemia, her

whole form convulsed and her accents inflected with hysterical rage. "I meant to have written him a note to-morrow to break off the engagement—that I did! Pa knows it—and ma too!"

"But we'll have our action for breach of promise," roared forth Mr. Boustead from the interior of his carriage, into which he had very courteously and politely rushed before handing in his wife and daughter.

Lord and Lady Ravenshill paid no farther attention to the irate family; but, descending the steps, proceeded in a leisurely manner along the gravel-walk in one direction—while the vehicle, turning round rolled off in another.

Such was the scene of which I became a witness. I do not however think that Lord and Lady Ravenshill foresaw that it would assume quite violent an aspect, when they first put on that air of cold reserve wherewith to receive the Bousteads, and which they probably thought would overpower and annihilate them completely. It was now evident enough that all ideas of a matrimonial alliance in that quarter were completely abandoned, even as a last resource and as an alternative which it was at all worth while reserving to fall back upon; so that the inference to be drawn, was that the Ravenshill family were perfectly sure of the match with Miss Jenkinson coming off.

On the following day fresh letters arrived from London for my lord and her ladyship; and immediately after their receipt, commands were issued that preparations should be made for their prompt departure for the metropolis. At first I was terribly alarmed lest I should be included amongst those domestics who were to accompany my lord and her ladyship: for I by no means relished the idea of re-

turning to the capital, and thus standing a chance of falling into the power of Mr. Lanover. But I was soon relieved from this apprehension, as only one travelling-carriage was set out—one valet and one maid only to accompany it. That same day they set off,—my lord and her ladyship being no doubt very anxious to be introduced to their future daughter-in-law: and in the servants' hall it was surmised, from something her ladyship had let drop to one of her maids, that the nuptials of the Hon. Mr. Walter with Miss Jenkinson were to be celebrated very shortly.

I could not help remarking that within the next few days there was an almost incessant calling of tradesmen from the town, at Charlton Hall, for the purpose of seeking interviews with the steward, the house-keeper, and the butler. Tradesmen from Exeter, who likewise furnished certain goods to the mansion, paid similar visits; and I gathered from the conversation of my fellow-servants that in consequence of the report of the match being broken off between Mr. Walter and Miss Boustead as well as by reason of the apparently abrupt departure of my lord and her ladyship—the tradesmen had experienced quite a panic, fearing lest the report of another marriage being on the *tapis* was a mere delusion. It was however apparent that they for the most part received satisfactory assurances from the chiefs of the domestic household; as in the great majority of instances they went away contented. But still it was not invariably so: for five or six of them grumbled openly and loudly,—not even hesitating to hint that from something they had heard, his lordship's affairs were in a state hopelessly beyond redemption,

no matter how brilliant an alliance Mr. Walter might contract. It was tolerably evident—and indeed, was soon known for a certainty—that Mr. Boustead, furious at the disappointment of his hope to become connected with the Ravenshill family, had been doing his best to produce this panic amongst the tradesmen, and that he had availed himself of his own peculiar knowledge of his lordship's affairs to propagate these very serious rumours to which some of the creditors alluded.

I remember that one tradesman—a wine-merchant residing at Exeter—was exceedingly plain and peremptory in the nature of the observations which he made. He arrived in his gig one afternoon—was closetted for some time with both the steward and butler—and when he issued forth from the private room of the former, he looked particularly dissatisfied.

"Well," he said, as he stalked along the passage towards the servants' entrance, at which his gig was standing,—and he spoke very loud as he addressed himself to the steward,—"you understand me. I have waited long enough. Two thousand seven hundred pounds to a provincial wine-merchant is rather too much. I have got his lordship's warrant-of-attorney; and if within one month from this date, my claim is not paid, I will send the bailiffs into the house. So don't let his lordship be deceived in the matter: for I am resolved. It has been nothing but promises, and shufflings, and putting-off; and subterfuges for a long time past."

The irate wine-merchant ascended into his gig: but again, ere he drove away, he bade the steward bear in mind what he said, and fail not to communicate his intentions to Lord Ravenshill.

A few days afterwards I heard the servants talking about something fresh which had come to their knowledge respecting Mr. Boustead's proceedings. It appeared that his lordship had a great many bills of exchange floating about in the town and likewise at Exeter: and all those which were not yet due the jilted Euphemia's father was getting into his own hands—evidently for the purpose of rendering himself a creditor of Lord Ravenshill, so that he might have the satisfaction of accelerating the ruin which he predicted as close at hand.

Three weeks had elapsed since the departure of my lord and her ladyship, when one morning—as I entered the servants' hall, shortly after the letter-bag had been brought from the town—I was struck by the mysteriously foreboding looks of my fellow-domestics and the ominous whispers which were passing amongst them. Presently one of the footmen said, addressing himself to me, "Well, Joseph, I am afraid it is all up with that affair in London; the match is broken off—and young master has been wounded in a duel."

"Mr. Walter wounded in a duel!" I exclaimed in perfect astonishment, and likewise much alarmed; for with all his faults there was something in him that I liked especially as I was aware how cruelly he had been deceived and duped in money affairs by his father.

"Yes—such is the report which by means of a few hurried lines written by her ladyship's maid to Emily,"—alluding to another of the tirewomen,—"has just reached us. But we know nothing more of the details—not even with whom Mr. Walter has fought. My lord and her lady-

ship will be back at the Hall to-night."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MR. RIDLEY.

BETWEEN seven and eight in the evening, the travelling-carriage was descried entering the park; and as it approached the mansion, those domestics who were assembled in the hall to receive my lord and her ladyship, expressed by their countenances the anxiety they felt as to whether the looks of those who were coming would confirm the inauspicious tidings received in the morning. It was indeed a very serious thing for the servants generally, on account of the large arrears of wages due to us all; and there was likewise a feeling of regret at the prospect of the downfall of the family and the triumph of the vindictive Bousteads.

The travelling-carriage rolled up to the entrance: Charles Linton sat upon the box—the valet and the maid in the rumble behind; and the expression of their features was indeed at the first glance but little reassuring. The door of the equipage was hastily opened: his lordship descended first—and presented his arm to assist her ladyship in alighting. His countenance was more than usually pale: It looked haggard and careworn. He trembled too with an evident nervousness, as if he had received a shock. Her ladyship was ill and suffering; and she leant with visible heaviness upon her husband's arm as she ascended the flight of steps to the entrance-hall. But Mr. Walter had not accompanied his father and mother home! My first impression therefore was—

and equally that of the other domestics—that he must have been very seriously wounded indeed. How cruel in such a case for his parents to have abandoned him, and to have come away without him! Such was the thought that flashed to my mind; but as I presently learnt, I did them an injustice: for in the servants' hall it was soon known that his wound was slight—that he might have travelled if he had chosen—but that under existing circumstances he had refused to come back to Devonshire.

But I must return to Lord Ravenshull and her ladyship, as they first appeared when alighting from the carriage. They had about them that undefinable but yet intelligible air which too painfully denotes the consciousness of blighted expectations, ruined hopes, and approaching downfall. Whatsoever attempt they might both have made to veil or subdue the betrayal of all they felt was now but too ineffectual: their cold aristocratic pride—their severe patrician reserve—afforded not a mantle wherein to enwrap their emotions. They passed into the dining-room; and there it was immediately requisite to supply wine-and-water for her ladyship, as she was overcome to such a degree as almost to sink off in a swoon.

That night—before the hour for retiring arrived—Charles Linton beckoned me to accompany him for a walk in the back garden; and when we were alone together, he said, "Now, Joseph, all my worst fears, which I expressed to you many months ago, are about to be confirmed. So surely as you behold those black clouds gathering over the sky and threatening a storm, are the dark clouds of ruin already assembling quickly above this mansion, full soon to burst!"

"Are his lordship's prospects indeed so hopeless?" I asked, with a feeling of deep sorrow.

"A miracle alone can save this devoted family, Joseph," responded Linton, in gloomy accents; "and it will not be wrought, because the age for miracles is gone by. No man has ever played his cards worse than his lordship did on that day when he broke off with the Bousteads. Contemptible as such an alliance would have been, it nevertheless might have proved his salvation. Now all is over; and in a few days the officials of the law will doubtless be in possession here."

"Is the contemplated match between Mr. Walter and Miss Jenkinson completely broken off?"

"Most completely," was the response. "That duel, and other circumstances—"

"Ah, the duel!" I said: "but with whom did Mr. Walter fight?"

"You remember," rejoined Charles, "that I one day gave you some little explanations about a certain Miss Alicia Cuthbert, and the gentleman who was supposed to be enamoured of her—namely, Captain Berkeley. It was with this Captain Berkeley that Mr. Walter exchanged shots, and by whom he was wounded in the right arm. You will have no difficulty in guessing that the duel arose from that very affair in which you, when dressed in female apparel, played so singular a part. But I will give you a few particulars, Joseph. No match could have been more eligible for Mr. Walter than the one which was settled to take place with Miss Jenkinson. His family wanted money—hers wanted a patrician alliance; and I am enabled to state that when Mr. Walter spoke to her father, with the young lady's consent, he

very frankly explained his position in a pecuniary point of view, and the encumbrances that are upon the estates to which he is the heir. Mr. Jenkinson probably knew all these things before: but doubtless our young master's candour made a favourable impression upon him. It was agreed that Mr. Walter should be received as the young lady's suitor; and my lord and her ladyship arrived from the country to form the acquaintance of their future daughter-in-law and her parents. They took up their abode at the town-mansion, where Mr. Ravenshill had been residing ever since we left the Hall six months back; and all seemed to go on well and comfortable for a fortnight. But then came anonymous letters from Devonshire to old Mr. Jenkinson and the young lady, to the effect that Mr. Walter had been engaged to Miss Boustead—that he had broken off the match under very dishonourable circumstances—and that he had been served by Mr. Boustead's attorney with a notice of action for breach of promise. This intelligence troubled the Jenkinsons very much: but I believe that such explanations were given as would have satisfied them, had not other untoward circumstances, producing a complete exposure, followed close upon the heels of the first. A grand party was given by some family in Belgrave Square, at which the Jenkinsons were present, as was also Mr. Walter: but my lord and her ladyship were not—I forget exactly why. Mrs. and Miss Cuthbert were amongst the guests; and when Mr. Walter endeavoured to pay his respects to them, they turned their backs upon him. This was seen by the Jenkinsons; but even that incident he might have explained away, were it not for what follow-

ed. Late in the evening Captain Berkeley made his appearance; and while Mr. Ravenshill was engaged in conversation with Mr. Jenkinson—to whom he always took care to be particularly courteous and polite—Captain Berkeley accosted them; and said to our young master, *'You are a scoundrel—a liar—and a forger! To-morrow morning you will hear from me, if I hear not from you.'*—He then walked away to another part of the room, as coolly and collectedly as if he had merely been exchanging some complimentary expressions, instead of flinging those terrible accusations at Mr. Ravenshill. No one save Mr. Jenkinson overheard what had passed: it was therefore evidently done by Captain Berkeley for the express purpose of exposing our young master to that gentleman. You may conceive, Joseph, that Mr. Jenkinson was astounded at what had taken place: but Mr. Walter no doubt enjoined him to subdue his emotions, so as to prevent creating a scandal beneath the hospitable roof of their mutual friends. Mr. Jenkinson immediately retired with his wife and daughter; and Mr. Walter left soon afterwards. The next morning he and Captain Berkeley fought near Humpstead; and as you already know, our young master was wounded in the arm. On the following day Mr. Ravenshill left abruptly for the Continent: but before he went, he told me that he could no longer afford to keep a valet for his own special attendance, and that I must thenceforth consider that I belonged entirely to his lordship's household. Poor young gentleman! I pitied him deeply. I besought him to let me accompany him,—giving him to understand as plainly as I could, that remuneration was of no con-

sequence until he should see better times: but he only shook his head in a gloomy manner and with a sickly smile—then abruptly quitted the room."

"This is indeed most sad," I observed, feeling acutely pained on Mr. Walter's account.

"This happened the day before yesterday," added Charles; "and early yesterday morning, the travelling carriage was got in readiness, and my lord and lady set out again for Devonshire."

"But wherefore did Captain Berkeley," I asked, "address such severe taunts as those to Mr. Walter?"

"Do you not comprehend, Joseph?" asked Linton. "It was evidently by means of a forged note, purporting to be sent by Captain Berkeley, that it was hoped to entice Miss Cutbert to the post-chaise that night you were taken for her. The stratagem must however have been seen through, and the authors of it suspected. Thus, you perceive, the scandal of this circumstance following so close upon the one respecting Miss Boustead, naturally caused the Jenkinsons to break off the match. They had seen that Mr. Ravenshill was cut by Mrs. and Miss Cuthbert—which fully corroborated the rumour that reached their ears as to the cause of the duel."

"And do you know," I inquired, "on what terms Mr. Ravenshill parted from his father and mother?"

"No—I obtained no knowledge on that point," responded Linton. "But I am aware that Mr. Ravenshill quitted the house abruptly, and without bidding them farewell. What might have previously passed between them, I know not. Her ladyship, as you may perceive, is most dreadfully cut up: she cannot conceal all she

suffers,—but she conceals a part; and therefore we may judge how acute must be the anguish thus experienced, when it cannot be entirely hidden by a woman of her strong mind. As for his lordship, he too must suffer profoundly: for he likewise betrays outwardly some portion of his care and woe."

Charles and I remained in the garden talking for some little time longer; and then we sought our respective chambers. I could not help wondering why Lord and Lady Ravenshill should have come back to the mansion in Devonshire; and on the following day, when Linton and I were again talking together, I spoke to him on the subject.

"The scandal created by the duel and other rumours that were afloat" answered Charles, "was too great for my lord and her ladyship to remain in London, or even so near London as Ravenshill House; and they had therefore really no alternative but to come back to Devonshire. Besides, his lordship must face his creditors: he must be upon the spot when the crisis comes. I suppose that he will move heaven and earth to make some fresh arrangements, and stave off the evil day. He has gone by himself to Exeter this morning; and he was up at an early hour writing letters. I am however afraid, Joseph, that things have gone much too far to be amended—that it is too late, and the crisis is at hand."

His lordship did not return from Exeter, which was only twenty miles distant, until a late hour in the evening; and when he descended from the carriage, he looked so haggard, care-worn, and fatigued, as to seem a dozen years older than he was a fortnight back. Her ladyship had kept her Chamber all day, and

a physician from the town had visited her: but she came down stairs to join her husband at the dinner-table; and as it was a part of my duty to be in attendance, I had an opportunity of noticing that scarcely a word was spoken between them, and that the food which they took upon their plates went away almost untasted. In the servants' hall there was a gloomy feeling, displayed by ominous looks and whispering in groups: while every one felt uneasy and unsettled. Indeed it was but too evident that Charles Linton's opinion was general through the household—that a crisis was at hand!

On the following morning between nine and ten o'clock,—just as the carriage was in readiness to convey his lordship into the town—a gig, in which three men were crowded, was seen driving up the avenue; and it stopped in front of the mansion. One of these men was dressed in a sort of half sporting style, with tightly fitting drab trousers—a cut-away green coat and brass buttons—a blue neckerchief; with an enormous diamond pin—and a hat having very wide brims and bulging out very much in the crown. He wore a great quantity of jewellery about his person; but had a mean, vile, and flashy look, which altogether rendered his appearance as little prepossessing as possible. His two companions were very queer characters indeed, so far as their aspect went. One was dressed in an exceedingly rusty suit of black: the coat was patched at the elbows, the trousers at the knees; and the new piecings formed a most disadvantageous contrast with the general seediness of the garments themselves. Several buttons were deficient on coat and waistcoat; and the man's linen looked as if it had been

washed in coffee-dregs. The other individual was still more remarkably apparelled: for though it was the sultry month of August, yet he wore a thick great-coat of drab colour, which had evidently never been made for him, inasmuch as its skirts reached the ground. It was stained and soiled in many places, as if with beer; and of this liquor both the man himself and his companion in rusty-black were redolent. The former seemed to have just disposed of a biscuit, or a piece-of bread and cheese, as the gig drove up to the Hall: for he was munching something and wiping his mouth on the sleeve of his drab coat.

I was standing on the steps at the time that the gig containing these three curious specimens of humanity drove up: and I was instantaneously seized with a suspicion of impending evil,—which was confirmed by an ominous ejaculation which involuntarily burst from the lips of the hall-porter. The individual who was bedizened with the jewellery, flung the reins upon the horse's back—leapt out of the gig—and mentioned for his companions, in the rusty black and the drab coat respectively, to remain seated in the vehicle for the present: then pulling out his card, he accosted me in a free-and-easy, half-familiar half-patronising way, exclaiming, "I say, youngster, just take my card to his lordship; and say it's Mr. Ridley as wishes to have a few words with his lordship very particular indeed. "He'll see it's of the firm of Sharpfist and Ridley—and he'll know who's who in a jitney."

I experienced a strange sort of feeling—half that of consternation, and half that of a cold shudder—the former as if smitten by some sudden calamity, the latter

as if the head and portruding tongue of a reptile were thrust out at me,—when I took the dirty piece of paste-board which Mr. Ridley presented. I did not hurry away as he seemed to expect I should: I was for the moment nailed to the spot. I took the card mechanically,—mechanically too did I bend my eyes upon it; and there was no longer the possibility of doubt as to the meaning of this visit, when I read the words, "SHARPFIST AND RIDLEY, *Exeter. Officers to the Sheriff of Devonshire.*"

"Now, youngster," exclaimed Mr. Ridley, as he lounged against the door-post. "Why don't you cut along and give that there card? What are you standing gaping at?"

"Yes—go, Joseph," said the hall-porter, who, from the depth of his huge leathern chair, was surveying Mr. Ridley with immitigable disgust: "go and take this person's card to his lord ship."

"Pusson, indeed?" ejaculated the officer, turning round and fixing an insolent stare upon the hall-porter; "who calls me a pusson, I should like to know? Come out of your ivy-bush, you great big red faced owl, with your scarlet coat, and that powdered wig on your sconce."

Indescribable was the dignity and stateliness with which the hall-porter slowly rose from his leathern throne: and bending a sternly scornful look upon Mr. Ridley, he seemed as if about to take summary proceedings to eject that individual from the threshold. But it was evident that the old man was all in a moment smitten with the recollection that the fellow came armed with the authority of the law; for his manner changed in a moment—he appeared to feel that "his occupation was gone"—and

sinking back into his huge leathern chair, he positively gave vent to a sob—I heard it—and I likewise saw a big tear roll down each cheek. At this instant—just as I was turning away to hurry up to the drawing-room and deliver the card, I myself being much affected by that display of feeling on the old porter's part—I beheld his lordship descending the great staircase.

"Is the carriage in readiness?" he demanded in usual authoritative manner: and this manner, too, had become blended with a considerable petulance since his return from London.

"Ye-e-s, my lord," said one of the footmen standing in the hall, and who spoke with a certain degree of hesitation and a singularity of look; "the carriage is in readiness, my lord—but, I think there is some one, my lord, that wishes—"

"Here, give us the card, youngster!" ejaculated Mr. Ridley, snatching it out of my hand. "If you was my lad, I would lay this horsewhip about your back, to make you look a little sharper:"—then advancing through the hall, he slightly touched his hat, without taking it off; and handing his lordship the card, said, "I am Mr. Ridley, my lord—of the firm of Sharpfist and Ridley."

The moment that the unfortunate nobleman's eyes encountered the flashly dressed individual—and before the latter had either tendered the card, or spoken a syllable to announce himself—I noticed that his lordship staggered back a pace or two, as if stricken a sudden blow: while an expression of indescribable anguish passed rapidly over his features, which turned ghastly. Instantaneously recovering himself, however, he waved his hand quickly to stop the sheriff's

officer in the middle of his sentence; and beckoning him to follow, led the way into the dining-room. Almost immediately afterwards, the bell of that apartment rang: one of the footmen hastened to answer the summons—and coming forth again in less than a minute, he said, "Where's Emily?"—alluding to one of her ladyship's maids I saw that he spoke in a hurried and excited manner; and as Emily at that instant made her appearance from a door at the extremity of the hall, he hastened towards her. She appeared quite confounded by the announcement which he made, and which I was at no loss to guess; then she began to cry—but quickly wiping her eyes, she sped upstairs.

"Well," said the footman, coming across the hall and speaking to the porter, "this is a bad job—isn't it? But it was foreseen. His lordship told me to desire Emily to go up and break as gently as she can the distressing intelligence to her ladyship; so that it may not reach her all of a sudden."

The door of the dining-room now opened; and his lordship came forth, followed by Mr. Ridley, who had his hat on: so that I really do believe he had not taken it off during their interview, and that his lordship felt somehow or another too much in the officer's power, or else was too much depressed and humiliated, to hint at his courtesy. The nobleman was as white as a sheet: his form appeared to be more bowed than was its wont—as if the calamity which had overtaken his house had fallen likewise with a physical weight upon his own shoulders—remaining there like a burthen which must be borne and could not be cast off.

"Now, Tom Austin I!" exclaimed

the Sheriff's officer, advancing to the threshold and beckoning to one of his men: you are to stay here. There's the paper—and his lordship has said that you'll have your grub and all that sort of thing in the reg'lar way."

The summons made to the gig had been answered by the man wearing the soiled and greasy drab coat; and it was now I observed that the skirts reached to the ground.

"Werry much obleegeed to his lordship," said Tom Austin carrying his hand to the brim of his battered hat. "I've no doubt I shall be werry comfortable here."

"Don't be afeard, my lord, that Tom will be up to any tricks," observed Mr. Ridley addressing the nobleman and pointing to the man. "He's a uncommon quiet sort of a chap—a say-nothing-to-nobody kind of a feller—and doesn't get larking with the gals or what not. His only fault is that if too much liquor is placed in his way, he'll get as drunk as blazes. So you must tell the butler, my lord to take the key out of the ale-tap. Good day, my lord."

With these words, Mr. Ridley carried his hand just half way to the front of his hat; and leaping up into the gig, drove away.

"You will take this person to the servants' hall," said Lord Ravenshill, beckoning towards him the same footman who had previously spoken to Emily: "and let him have his meals there—at the side table with the scullions," added his lordship; these last words being delivered in what dramatic authors and theatrical folks would term "*an aside*."

Tom Austin accordingly followed the footman from the hall; and I could not help observing the contrast between the tall, well-fed, gorgeously-attired livery servant—and the shambling, shuffling, dirty, ill-looking fellow who

was at his heels. His lordship counter-ordered the carriage, and proceeded slowly up-stairs—I believe to her ladyship's chamber. Thus the crisis had come at last: the first stroke of the Ravenshill house had sounded portentously upon every ear: the first gripe of the law's hand was fastened upon the property of this doomed family.

In the course of the day I learnt from Charles Linton that the execution was put in by that Exeter wine merchant whose threatenings I had overheard. It was only for two thousand seven hundred pounds—a small sum, one would think, for a nobleman possessed of such immense estates, producing such large revenues: but it was only too evident that his lordship could not command the amount—and even if he could, its payment would have been but as a drop of water to the ocean when all the other enormous liabilities were taken into consideration. On the following day Mr. Ridley called again—had another interview with his lordship—and placed three or four fresh papers in Tom Austin's hands: so it was soon known that additional seizures had taken place. For several successive days these visits on the Sheriff's officer's part were renewed, every time to put in fresh executions: for when once the intelligence was spread in the neighbouring town and at Exeter that the bailiffs were in possession at Charlton Hall, the creditors appeared to vie with each other in the rapidity with which they sought to enforce their claims.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

THROUGHOUT my long and varied experiences, which are to be fully recorded in the course of these memoirs, I do not remember that I ever encountered such a character as Mr. Thoms Austin. So far from justifying any one of the eulogiums which Mr. Ridley had passed upon him the first day of his arrival at the Hall, he was in every detail the very opposite. Instead of being a silent person, he was the most garrulous individual that ever was: indeed, he would talk from morning to night, if he could get anybody to listen to him. But his whole conversation was connected with sheriffs' officers, executions, captions, levying, sales, warrants-of-attorney cognovits, *fi. fa.'s, ca. sa.'s* and in short every possible process relating to debtor and creditor. In these respects he certainly possessed a marvellous fund of anecdote; and he chuckled over all kinds of rogueries, chicaneries, and double dealings whereby he had known debtors to outwit their creditors, or creditors to take unconscionable advantage of debtors—with a zest and a *gusto* as if they were the most capital jokes and the finest exploits in the whole world.

He was one of the dirtiest and most disgusting men as to his person that could be well conceived,—not thinking of taking the trouble to wash himself oftener than every other day—and then only having what he called “a rinse” at the pump instead of using the basin and ewer which were of course provided in the chamber allotted him. As for shaving, this performance he could only bring his mind to about every fourth or fifth day; and in respect to his hair, I do

not think it was combed all the time he was in possession—which was about six weeks. He might have blacked his shoes if he had chosen—but he did not! and they remained encrusted with mud (picked up during the rainy weather before he came to the Hall) the whole time he was there.

As for eating and drinking, Thomas Austin was never at a loss: he was always hungry and always thirsty. Every half-hour during the day he might be seen munching bread and cheese, or eating a piece of bread and cold meat with a clasp-knife,—never on these occasions seeming to recollect that there was such a thing in the world as a plate. As often as he could find an opportunity, he sneaked with a mug in his hand—(he always preferred a mug to a glass)—to the ale-barrel; and as he was seldom interfered with, notwithstanding Mr. Ridley's advice to the contrary he was invariably in a state of intoxication by about five o'clock in the evening—sometimes so early as midday. During the brief intervals between his countless repasts, he would seek some nook in the back part of the premises; and preferring an inverted tub or a pail turned topsy-turvy to a chair, would sit smoking a short pipe in a kind of half-drowsy, half-ruminating fashion. But, as above stated, when he could get anybody to listen to his stories, he would even forget his bread and cold meat—would lay down his pipe—and talk away as long as he was attended to. Here is a specimen of one of these anecdotes of Mr. Thomas Austin's:—

"I don't think I ever told you about that there business of Sir George Dashwood's. Ah! Sir George was a fine feller: he had three thousand a year, and spent thirty. Took his bottled ale and

cherry-brandy again for lunch—his three bottles of wine every day for dinner—and was carried up to bed every night of his life. That's what I call doing the thing slap-up: that's the way a gentleman ought to live! None of your tea and slops for breakfast—your *one* glass of sherry and biscuit for lunch—and your pint of wine for dinner—then coffee and slops again in the drawing-room—and then walking up to bed as steady and sober as if you hadn't got a flunkey to carry you. That's not what I calls life: it's only a wishy-washy kind of existence. Ah! Sir George Dashwood—or Georgy Dashwood as we used to call him—did things better than that: he would have scorned himself if he had been caught going to bed sober, and couldn't have abeared to look his walley-de-shamble in the face next morning if he hadn't been carried up quite blazing. Well, I needn't tell you—cos why you must all have heerd it—that Sir George had a lovely place called Dashwood Park, about fifteen miles t'other side of Exeter; and he run through all his property in a matter of five year arter he come of age: so he was only twenty-six when he was ruined. Ah! a prime feller was Georgy—always three or four prize-fighters staying at his house, dining at his table, and treated just for all the world as well as hisself. Well, von day—that's about seven year ago now—Ridley says to me, says he, 'I say Tom, you and me must just go down to Georgy Dashwood's and take possession.'—So we gets into the gig, and down we drives to George's, getting there at two o'clock in the afternoon, just as Georgy and his friends was a sitting down to lunch. There was a dozen on 'em; and such prime company! There was Tim Bullockhead, the Champion

of England; and a couple of other milling coves—regular smashers of their kind. Then there was honest Jack Robins, the horse chaunter. Ah! he knowed a trick or two about hosses—didn't he? that's all! And then there was a couple of splendid chaps as kept fighting cocks; and there was three jockies, and Ben Snelling the trainer. A sharp feller was Ben! Howsomer, I don't recollect who the rest was; but I knew they was all of the right sort; and they was setting at table, drinking the bot-tled ale and the cherry-brandy, and kicking up such a thundering row, when me and Ridley goes in. So the instant we enters, Georgy twigs us, and gives us each such a hearty shake of the hand, as if we was his best friends and had come to do him a service. So he makes us sit down; and we gets so precious jolly, that when Ridley wanted to go away, he was too drunk to get into his gig; and Georgy and the others puts him under the pump, and pumps on him for ten minutes, till he was nigh drownded—but quite sober. So away he goes—and I was left in possession."

At this part of his story, Tom Austin was wont to pause and assume a very complaisant look, as if mentally contemplating with infinite satisfaction the pumping feat and the jocose hilarity of Sir George Dashwood and his delectable friends.

"Well," he resumed, "I never had such a time of it in all my life. I was in possession about three months, Sir George keeping off the sale by feeing Sharpfist and Ridley ten pound a week; and I never goes to bed sober the whole time. Often and often I was blind drunk at noon; and led such a game I raly began to think I was a tip-top genelman myself. Georgy gave me this

coat, he did: so you see I've had it a matter of seven year: It isn't veared out yet. I keeps it for poor George's sake. At last things couldn't go on no longer: no more fees was coming for Sharpfist and Ridley. So von day down comes Ridley with the hauctioneer to take the wallyation. Georgy seemed to get happier the nearer the time came; and he used to say to me, slapping me on the shoulder—for Georgy and me was quite formiliar,—'Tom,' says he 'I've had five year on it, and that's enow for any genelman as calls hisself a genelman. A snort life and a merry von,' says he, 'that's my maxim. I think I should have been happier, Tom, if I'd gone a little faster. Howsomer, Tom,' says he, 'I've done it up brown enough; and that's a blessing. When's the sale, Tom?'—'In three days, sir,' says I.—'Werry good, Tom,' says he: 'we'll spree it out till the last. They let us drink the wine: so arter all, there's nothink to say agin your people, Tom.'—And for them three days we did keep it up too, I can tell you,—everyone going blazing drunk to bed, servants and all, except Georgy hisself; and for them three days he used to sleep under the table where he tumbled down, cos why his wally-de-shambles was too tosticated to carry him up as they was wont to do. They just managed to get to their rooms; but he was too far gone to reach his'n. Well, the morning of the sale comes: every winder of the old manor-house was kivered with posting bills; and there was a precious lot of brokers and what not, assembled in the hall, where the sale took place. All went on pleasant enough,—Georgy sitting close to the hauctioneer and cracking his joke as harticle after harticle was knocked down. Well,

at two o'clock there was lunch ; and George was the gayest of the gay,—singing, and laughing and telling such capital stories, he kept us all in a roo-ar. The hauctioneer lunched with us ; and Georgy tried hard to make him drunk, but couldn't. Well, when the hauctioneer gets up from lunch, and says, says he, 'Now, Sir George, with your leave, we'll go back and knock off this here little business.'—Georgy says, says he, 'Just von glass of champagne all round, cos I see by the katilog the wines is to be sold next ; and when vonce they're knocked down, I sha'nt have no more right to touch a single bottle.'—So a dozen of champagne and glasses was ordered up all at vonce. The glasses was filled : and Georgy says, says he, 'Now I'll give yer a toast,' says he.—So we all gets up too ; and he says, says he, 'Here's the health of the chap, whomsoever he was, that inventeed the maxim *a short life and a merry von*.'—So we all cries out, 'Brayvo! hooray !' and we puts our glasses to our lips. But at that werry same moment I see Georgy take summut out of his veskit-pocket, though I didn't know nuffin at the time what it were: but as he holds his glass in von hand he seems to put t' other over it for an instant: then quick as thought he drains his glass—and down he tumbles, stone dead. He had pisoned hisself.

The listener to this anecdote would naturally express his horror in some way or another—either by an ejaculation or a gesture : whereupon it was Tom Austin's wont to look half indignantly at such conduct ; and say in a sort of scornful manner, " Well, how would you have a gentleman of that stamp end his days ? You wouldn't have him go and break stones in the road and lower his-

self to labour and vulgarity—would yer ? Deuce a bit on't ! Georgy Dashwood wasn't that kind of chap. I on'y wishes as how everybody where I'm in possession was like him—that I does!"

This anecdote and the mode in which it was told will enable the reader to form some idea of the pleasant and agreeable character which the servants at Charlton Hall had amongst them, in the person of Thomas Austin. But I will not dwell at any greater length upon the attributes, either physical or mental, of the man in possession : other matters of graver and more important interest demand my attention.

I have already said that fresh executions kept pouring into Charlton Hall; and these were on the part of the numerous tradesmen of the adjacent town and the city of Exeter, who had been wont to supply the household. Intelligence was soon whispered at the Hall that seizures on the part of London creditors had been effected at the town mansion, and at Ravenshill House near Richmond. Thus was the work of ruin going rapidly on in respect to this doomed family. It was not confined to one spot—it was not limited to one part of their possessions : it spread like wildfire—and wherever there was property to seize, the hand of the law made its grasp. Her ladyship kept entirely to her own chamber : his lordship seldom crossed the threshold of Charlton Hall ; and when he did, it was merely to walk for a short half-hour in the garden, where he plunged into the seclusion of shady avenues. He went not to the town nor to Exeter : he made no visible effort to check the portentous tide of ruin that was rolling in upon him. Yet I do not think he had altogether lost his energies : on the contrary, I

believe that if there had been a single straw of hope to clutch at, he was the man to make the attempt however desperate, to save himself. But doubtless he saw that it was all in vain: doubtless the fearful conviction was too deeply stamped upon his soul that ruin was inevitable and that he could no more contend against the advancing rush of the overwhelming torrent than an enfeebled swimmer could struggle with the rapids of Niagara.

Moreover, Lord Ravenshill must of course have known that even the worst had not yet come; and that while day after day kept up the succession of destructive blows, harder and sterner ones yet remained to be dealt. Three weeks after the first seizure was put in, Mr. Boustead asserted his claim in a similar manner for about ten thousand pounds,—this being the aggregate amount of the various bills of exchange which he had contrived to get into his possession. It was understood at the Hall that his lordship felt this blow most severely: and it was natural that he should do so. In the first place, he must have contemplated with bitterest regret having so insolently, and even rudely, broken off a connexion which—however unpalatable to himself, his wife, and his son—had nevertheless been positively courted and encouraged in the origin by themselves. In the second place, he must have deeply felt that had this connexion been persevered in and consolidated, it would have proved the means of saving his family from so much degradation, and his fortunes from the catastrophe of ruin.

A week after Mr. Boustead's execution was put in, a lawyer came down from London, and

obtained the assistance of the local Sheriff's officers to take possession of the estate itself on behalf of the mortgages: for it appeared that this process was admissible on account of the papers which his lordship had so rashly and wickedly persuaded his son Mr. Ravenshill to sign. Thus, at the expiration of a month from the date of the first seizure, the whole property, personal and landed, was in the hands of the officials of the law; and instead of one man in possession, we had several.

But all this time not a word was said to the domestics relative to the chance—or rather the certainty of the household being broken up. No warning was given to us in respect to leaving: and as for wages, months had passed since we had received even an instalment of the arrears. Everything was in a state of unsettled feverishness; and considering the circumstances in which his lordship was so cruelly placed, no applications were made to him by any of the servants on the score of money matters. I should observe that although several of the surrounding nobility and gentry continued to call as usual, just as if nothing extraordinary were taking place,—the reply given by the hall-porter was always that his lordship was not at home, and that her ladyship was too ill to quit her chamber. No dinner parties, nor balls, nor soirees now enlivened the Hall—no roseate floods of luxury filled the spacious saloons: no silvery voices of mirth and gaiety, nor sounds of music, broke in upon the dull monotony of the scene. And yet it was not altogether monotonous: for, as above hinted, the comings and goings of the myrmidons of the law sustained a feverish excitement, and one that was truly

unpleasant for every soul beneath that roof.

One forenoon, about five weeks after the first seizure, I was much astonished, while conversing with the hall-porter, to behold the gaudy equipage of Mr. Boustead approaching up the carriage-drive; and on stopping at the entrance, that gentleman himself alighted.

"Go and see what he wants, Joseph," said the hall-porter, speaking in a quick voice, and with an expression of countenance indicating that a sudden hope had sprung up in his mind.

I accordingly hurried down the steps, and Mr. Boustead said, "His lordship has requested me to call: you will denounce me at once."

Had Miss Euphemia been present, she would perhaps, in the spirit of gentle correction, have reminded her father that he had wrongly spoken the first syllable of the word: but he came alone, neither his wife nor daughter being with him. I hastened to show him into the dining-room,—while a footman hurried upstairs to acquaint his lordship with his arrival. In a few minutes the nobleman descended the stairs; and though pale even to ghastliness—as for weeks past he had been—it was nevertheless evident that he had armed himself with a certain degree of calm severity and resigned fortitude; as if having made up his mind to proffer overtures for a reconciliation, he purposed to do so with a becoming dignity, and to exhibit no disappointment if they should be rejected. He entered the dining-room; and for two hours did his lordship and Mr. Boustead remain in conference together. At the expiration of that time they issued forth,—the nobleman accompanying the capitalist as far as the threshold of the hall;

and as the latter entered his carriage, his lordship bowed with a sort of condescending affability. It may easily be supposed that this visit gave rise to many conjectures and speculations in the servants' hall; and every one expressed the hope that it would lead to some great change in the present aspect of affairs. This hope did not appear to be without foundation,—when, on the following day his lordship gave orders that Mr. Ravenshill's chamber was to be got in readiness for his reception, he being about to return to the Hall. Accordingly, in the afternoon of that same day, a postchaise and four drove up to the mansion; and Mr. Walter alighted.

Heavens, how changed he was; Pale, haggard, and careworn, he looked a dozen years older than when I had last seen him seven or eight months back: he was but the ghost of his former self! Lord Ravenshill, having doubtless perceived the approach of the vehicle, came down from the drawing-room to meet his son. I saw by the nobleman's manner that he meant to embrace him: but the greeting on Mr. Walter's part was cold and distant; and the smile which for a moment appeared upon his lip, was sickly and wan.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BILLET.

ON the following day Lady Ravenshill descended from her own chamber to the drawing-room, for the first time since the executions had been placed in the house. She also was frightfully altered,—looking pale as a spectre, and thin even to emaciation. She was apparell'd with her ac-

customed elegance; and there seemed to be a hideous mockery in that gay raiment clothing one whose personal appearance was so corpse-like and so ghastly. In the afternoon the Bousteads' equipage arrived at the hall; and this time the capitalist was accompanied by his wife and daughter. Their visit did not extend beyond half an hour; and when they took their departure, Lord Ravenshill and his son escorted them to the carriage,—Euphemia leaning upon the arm of the latter. It was therefore evident that a reconciliation had been effected, and that the matrimonial project was revived.

On the following day the Bousteads came again; and this time their stay was prolonged to an hour. But the men in possession were not withdrawn: they received no intimation that any change in the condition of affairs was likely to take place: all seemed thus far enveloped in mystery. In the evening, however, of that second day of the Bousteads' visit, Charles Linton gave me some little intelligence.

"Mr. Ravenshill," he said, "hinted to me just now that the day after to-morrow he is to be married by special license to Miss Boustead. The ceremony will take place at the Hall, and with the strictest privacy. No guests are to be invited, beyond the actual bridal party; and immediately after the solemnization Mr. Ravenshill and his bride will leave for Torquay. I am not to mention this to the servants generally: perhaps Mr. Ravenshill would not even have thus far made me his confidant, only that I am to accompany him,—and moreover he is evidently mindful of my conduct towards him, when after the duel in London I besought that he would not discharge me from his service on

the mere ground of his inability to remunerate me."

"Then I suppose the debts will all be paid and the men in possession will be withdrawn? Ah! I can assure you, Charles," I went on to observe, "that I shall be truly rejoiced to behold such a sudden change in his lordship's circumstances."

"There can be no doubt, Joseph, that it is altogether a matter of pecuniary expediency; and that Mr. Ravenshill has consented to sacrifice himself to save his family from ruin. Ah! it was with a ghastly look of despair that he spoke the few words which gave me the knowledge I have just imparted to you. As a matter of course, old Boustead will not part with a single shilling until he has seen the nuptial-knot tied; and therefore I suppose all the legal processes will go on just the same until the last instant,—when the capitalist will produce his money bags. But you must not say a word of all this to any of the other servants."

I promised compliance with Linton's injunction; and therefore with the household generally everything continued to be shrouded in mystery—save and except so far as conjecture enabled the domestics to penetrate somewhat into the new arrangements that were progressing. But they were very far from surmising that the intended marriage was so close at hand. On the following morning their hopes of an amicable settlement of his lordship's affairs were considerably damped, when Mr. Ridley and an auctioneer came over from Exeter to take the necessary preliminaries for the sale of the personal property, which was fixed for the third day thence Catalogues had been already printed; and now commenced the process of affixing tickets

with numerals upon them, to every article throughout the mansion. In this service the men in possession were all included: most of the domestics were likewise called upon to help, the steward intimating that it was by his lordship's orders, so as to prevent the myrmidons of the law from penetrating into the private apartments. Ah! methought the celebration of a marriage under such circumstances,—a marriage to take place in a drawing-room where every article of furniture, and every ornament, even to the most trifling nicknack, was ticketed for sale,—must at least be a singular if not an ominous spectacle. The Bousteads paid their usual visit on this day, and his lordship, on seeing them to their carriage was far more courteously polite than ever I had before observed him to be towards the capitalist and his family. As for Mr. Walter,—his bearing towards Euphemia was that of a polished gentleman; but cold, reserved, and constrained—How was it possible for it to be otherwise? •

It was verging towards sunset on that same day, that I walked alone through the grounds, my services not being in any way required for an hour or two at the Hall. I had thus strolled to a distance of about a mile, wrapped up in my reflections,—when I observed a lady approaching from the direction of the road. As she drew nearer, I saw that she was young and beautiful. Her age could not have been more than one-and-twenty: she was tall and finely formed,—elegance and grace characterizing her whole appearance. Her hair was dark—her eyes of a deep blue: she looked pale—but not with a pallor that seemed natural. It was evidently the result of fatigue or care—perhaps both combined:

and as I drew nearer, I likewise noticed that there was the glitter of suspense and uneasiness in those beauteous eyes of hers. She surveyed me very hard, as if she wished to speak: but as she did not immediately address me, I passed her by. Having proceeded perhaps for twenty paces, wondering who she could be, and whether she was going to the Hall,—marvelling likewise that she should be by herself, and on foot, at that time of the evening, as well as in so lonely a place,—I looked back: She was standing on the spot where I had passed her, gazing after me. I stopped short, hesitating whether to accost her with some question,—such as if she had lost her way and was seeking any particular destination?—when she beckoned me towards her. I hastened to obey the summons: but even when I accosted her, she still appeared uncertain what to say, or whether to speak at all. At length, with a visible effort, she put aside all farther hesitation; and observed, “You are in the service of Lord Ravenshill?”

“I am, madam,” was my answer; “and if I could do anything to oblige you, I shall be truly happy.”

Again she surveyed me with penetrating earnestness: and after a long pause she said in a tone of audible and perhaps involuntary musing, “Yes—I think I can trust you. Your appearance—But will you do me a favour?” she asked, thus suddenly interrupting herself: “and I will reward you liberally.”

“I do not need any reward, madam,” was my immediate response “but whatever services I can render, you may command them.”

“I see that I am not deceived in you,” the young lady observed: “you are evidently above your

position. Do not think ill of me that I have thus addressed you — still more, do not think ill of me for the favour I am about to solicit at your hands."

There was so much sweetness in her manner,—so much kind yet perfectly lady-like and dignified affability,—that I was much prepossessed on her behalf. She seemed uneasy, and even excited —as if hope and fear were struggling in her bosom.

"I am certain, not to think ill of you, madam," I hastened to observe ; "for I am confident you could enjoin me not ask which I may not honourably and becomingly fulfil."

At least promise me *this*," she hastily exclaimed,—that if when I have named my request—which is a simple, though it may appear a strange one—you should have any scruples in granting it, you will not breathe to a soul the circumstance that you have met me here, or that such a favour has been sought at your hands."

"Most faithfully do I give that promise," was my rejoinder.

She drew forth a note from a reticule which she carried in her hand ;—the hand too which held that note trembled visibly ; and I observed the blood mantle upon her cheeks—then vanish again as suddenly, leaving them by the contrast paler than they were before. Methought that some powerful inward struggle was taking place—a struggle perhaps between the prideful modesty of her sex, and some other as well as more tender feeling. She looked at the note and then at me : hesitation and reluctance marked her conduct. But again exhibiting a suddenness of decision, she said, "Will you undertake—with the least possible delay, and likewise with the strictest secrecy —to place this note in the hands of Mr. Ravenshill ?"

"I will," was my prompt answer —for I could not possibly conceive that I was doing wrong in complying with a request put by one so lady-like, so beautiful, and whose motives for her present proceeding were evidently of such importance as to struggle successfully against her innate sense of modesty. "Within an hour from the present time," I went on to observe, "Mr. Ravenshill shall have this note—and no one shall see me give it him."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" answered the lady: then, with a renewal of her hesitating manner, she drew her purse forth from her reticule, saying, "Shall I insult you if—"

"Not for the world will I accept the slightest reward!" I exclaimed. "Fear not that your errand will be unfaithfully or clumsily executed :"—and with these words I darted away in the direction of the Hall.

Looking back in the course of a few minutes, I perceived a post-chaise hastening along the road which bounded the park: and I therefore concluded it was this vehicle which had brought the lady thither, and in which she was now taking her departure. On I sped towards the mansion, —feeling as if I were the messenger of good tidings, but without having the slightest comprehension of what their nature could be. As I neared the Hall, I was much gratified on beholding Mr. Ravenshill himself issuing forth, —doubtless for the purpose of roaming in solitude and giving way without restraint to his mournful reflections. In a few minutes I was by his side ; and as he stopped short abruptly, he doubtless saw by my features that I had something of importance to communicate.

"What is it, Joseph?" he asked. "Any new calamity?"—and an

expression of anguished bitterness passed over his features.

"I hope not, sir—I think not," was my response: and I tendered him the billet.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, instantaneously recognising the writing, which was in a beautiful fluent female hand; and all in a moment did joy, suspense, and amazement succeed that other look which I had just observed on his countenance. "Who gave you this? how did it come?"

But without waiting for any answer, he tore open the billet. The lines it contained were evidently few—for they were quickly scanned by his eager eyes: yet great must have been their importance, for the ejaculation "Thank God!" fell in fervent accents from his lips. He seemed to be overpowered by his joy; and tears gushed forth from his eyes,—as if some tremendous weight had been lifted from his soul, and the sense of relief found its natural issue in those tears. For more than a minute he thus remained under the influence of his feelings,—apparently unconscious that I was standing near and observing him. I should have retired at once, only that I knew there were questions which he must desire to put to me.

"Who gave you this note, Joseph?" he at length asked. "Tell me quick—who gave it to you?"

"A young lady—"

"Ah! it is she herself then! And what said she?"

"The lady merely asked me," I responded, "to do her a service—which I willingly undertook—"

"And she enjoined you to the secrecy—did she not?" interrupted Mr. Ravenshill.

"Yes, sir: and that injunction I shall assuredly obey."

"You are a good youth, Joseph,"

cried my young master,—“an excellent youth! I must reward you liberally—”

"No, sir," I answered. "The young lady herself proffered me a recompense: but I respectfully declined it."

"Well, go, Joseph—return to the Hall," resumed Mr. Ravenshill, evidently under the excitement of these new feelings of hope and joy wherewith the letter had inspired him. "But for heaven's sake, breathe not a syllable—"

"No, sir—not a syllable to a soul. Believe me, I am incapable of such folly and treachery:"—and with these words, I hastened away, my heart rejoicing at the sudden change which had been effected by the billet in the mind of Mr. Ravenshill.

I did not see my young master any more that evening; and when I descended from my bed-room at the usual hour in the morning, I found three or four of the servants, together with Thomas Austin and the other men in possession, conversing in an excited way, relative to an incident that appeared to be involved in some degree of mystery.

"It's of no use a-talking like this here," said Tom Austin, as he cut a piece of cold meat on a slice of bread, and began munching this little refection to stay his stomach ere breakfast should be served up; "it's my dooty to see as how the doors and gates is all locked afore going up to bed: and I'll be on my salvation hoath that I see the back door and the garden gate all as right as trivets."

"But who could have gone out, then, in the middle of the night—or else early this morning before anybody was up?" demanded one of the footmen angrily. "It must lie with some of you chaps,"

—addressing himself scornfully to the men in possession: “and I for one don’t mean to be got into a scrape, by any such nonsense as this.”

As I listened to the colloquy which was thus progressing, a vague suspicion stole into my mind; and I looked about for Charles Linton, in order to see whether he had as yet been up to call Mr. Ravenshill,—who, I should observe, was accustomed to rise early. But I could not find him; and I soon perceived that the work specially belonging to Charles was not yet commenced. I ascended to his chamber: he was not there. I went down stairs again—waited for another half-hour—and then inquired of some of my fellow-servants if they had seen Charles? The response was in the negative: so I took a pitcher of hot water; and again ascending the stairs, proceeded this time to Mr. Ravenshill’s apartment. It was unoccupied; and on the table lay a letter addressed to his lordship. I then knew that my suspicion was correct:—Mr. Walter had evidently fled!

I took the letter—went down stairs—and communicated the circumstance. The domestics were all astonished; and they instantaneously began speculating and conjecturing what this sudden disappearance could mean: for it was clear enough that Mr. Ravenshill was gone, and that Charles Linton had accompanied him. The general and most natural supposition was, that our young master had departed in order to avoid being dragged into an alliance with Miss Boustead: though none of the servants were aware that this marriage had been so positively and definitely fixed for that very day. I could perhaps have thrown a little more light on the subject

—for it was evident enough to me that Mr. Walter had found a far more suitable bride in the fair writer of the billet, than in the ugly and affected Euphemia; but I held my peace, and hastened to take the letter which my young master had left, to his lordship.

The nobleman had only just descended to the breakfast-parlour as I entered: and the moment I made my appearance, he said, “What, have the letters come so early?”

“No, my lord,” I answered—but with some degree of hesitation; for I foresaw that a fearful shock was about to be occasioned by the letter I carried—“I found this, my lord, on—on the table in Mr. Ravenshill’s—”

“What! where is Mr. Ravenshill? where is my son?” ejaculated his lordship, seized with misgivings that were painfully evident: and he snatched up the letter from the silver salver—then tearing it open, gave vent to a low but agonized ejaculation, as his eyes glanced at the first few lines.

I withdrew from the breakfast-room, and purposely avoided returning immediately to the servants’ hall—as I did not wish to be questioned. I went and walked in the garden until I thought breakfast was ready: and on re-entering the house I found the utmost excitement prevailing amongst the domestics. His lordship had been found in a fit in the breakfast-room: her ladyship was instantaneously made acquainted with the circumstance—and she, on reading the letter which was discovered lying open on the carpet as it had dropped from her husband’s hand, had likewise fainted away. They had however both been recovered without the necessity of sending for medical assistance; and from

the broken sentences to which they had given utterance on coming back to consciousness, enough was gleaned to make those who attended upon them acquainted with what had happened. Mr. Walter had indeed stealthily taken his departure, in order to avoid a match that was hateful to him, and to form another alliance where his heart was already engaged.

In the course of an hour his lordship was sufficiently recovered to write a letter, which was immediately sent off to its destination. This was to Mr. Boustead; and it was by no means difficult to conjecture that it was for the purpose of announcing the definitive breaking off of the match between Mr. Ravenshill and his daughter. A couple of hours later, a post-chaise-and-four arrived from the town: for Lord Ravenshill and his wife were now about to leave their stately mansion—perhaps for ever.

Although it was difficult to experience much sympathy for this thoroughly selfish and worldly-minded couple, it was nevertheless painful to reflect that after having all their lives been accustomed to ride in splendid equipages of their own, they were now reduced to the necessity of travelling in a hired one—and this, too, on the occasion of bidding farewell to the home where they had been wont to entertain such brilliant assemblages, and where they had revelled in the enjoyment of every luxury. By his lordship's express command, the domestics all remained in the servants' hall at the moment of departure—with the exception of one valet and one lady's-maid, who were to accompany them. Their pride was dominant until the very last: they could not endure the thought

of passing out of that mansion ruined and undone, in the presence of those who had been the witnesses of their splendour. Not even the old hall-porter was suffered to remain at his post, as Lord and Lady Ravenshill thus issued forth. But doubtless conjecture was busy in the servants' hall at the time, as to the spectacle which the nobleman and his wife presented to the two domestics whom they had chosen to follow them in this phase of their broken fortunes. Terrible must have been their feelings as they descended the superb staircase—as they passed through the spacious hall—as they crossed the marble threshold—and as they entered a vehicle the appearance of which was sordid and wretched to a degree, in comparison with their own travelling-barouche with its emblazoned panels and its luxurious cushions. Doubtless that old lord exerted all his energy to conquer his emotions: and doubtless the severe pride of her ladyship made her keep back her tears as she clung to her husband's arm. At length the post-chaise was rolling along the shady avenue towards the park-gate: but every feature of the scenery—every tree which was thus passed—every glimpse of a browsing deer or frisking fawn, must have conjured up bitter, bitter associations of the past in the minds of that ruined nobleman and his unhappy lady.

Shortly after the post-chaise had departed, the steward summoned the domestics one by one into his own room, and informed us that by agreement between his lordship and the mortgagees who had seized upon the estate, we were all to be paid in full—for which purpose the funds would be forthcoming on the following day. A computation was made of the arrears due to each; and

it was understood that, as we were all to leave on the morrow, a month's wages would be given us in addition.

On the following day the sale of the furniture and personal property commenced. From an early hour, vehicles of all kinds began arriving in rapid succession: and persons on foot, likewise, made their appearance in considerable numbers from the adjacent town. Noblemen gentlemen, and ladies, dwelling in the neighbourhood, came in their carriages for the purpose of selecting such articles as they might fancy to purchase,—some remaining to bid for them in person, others empowering agents to conduct the business on their behalf. Furniture-brokers, dealers in objects of *vertu* and curiosities, goldsmiths and jewellers, and a tolerable sprinkling of the Jewish fraternity,—some from the town, some from Exeter, others from remoter places, and others even from London—congregated at Charlton Hall. The place was like a fair, gaiety, business, and bustle pervaded the scene:—of sympathy for the ruined and self-exiled family, there was none!

Several solicitor and Sheriff's officers were likewise in attendance: the men in possession appeared full of importance, and gave themselves extraordinary airs,—with the exception of Tom Austin, who was excessively drunk as early as eight o'clock on this memorable morning; and who, having been missed for some three or four hours, was at length discovered sitting in the beer-cellar with his back propped up against the ale-barrel,—a slice of bread, a piece of cold meat, and his clasp-knife lying beside him,—he being actually too far gone even to cut his food or convey it to his lips. But it was

about ten o'clock when the sale commenced,—the auctioneer removing from room to room as he successively disposed of their contents in detail. The spectacle for one who could sympathize with the ruined family was of an exceeding mournful interest. Articles which had evidently cost large sums of money when originally purchased, were now knocked down at comparatively trifling amounts: furniture, plate, china, time-pieces, mantel ornaments, lustres, candelabra, pictures, curiosities, and valuables of all sorts, were thus rapidly disposed of;—and though the auctioneer did his business quickly, yet was it evident that the sale must last for three or four days. Thus was it that all the accumulations which had been made to gratify refined taste, to constitute the means of luxury, and become accessories to the splendour and magnificence of the Ravenshill family,—were being scattered hither and thither—falling into fresh hands—finding new owners. It was a scene from which the most touching as well as the sternest morals might be deduced, this breaking up of an almost princely establishment—this severing and dispersing of the countless evidences of lordly luxury and patrician splendour!

A little before noon, the carriage of the Bousteads arrived at the mansion; and I must confess that I was infinitely surprised on beholding the two ladies, as well as the capitalist himself, alight. Mrs. Boustead talked very loud in her bassoon-like voice—evidently for the be-hoof of all who were near enough to listen: but the principal string upon which she harped was the fall which the pride of the Ravenshills had experienced. Euphemia affected to laugh and

giggle as if it were all most delightful sport for her; and it was easy to perceive that she experienced a bitterly spiteful satisfaction at the contemplation of a scene in the midst of which she had the bad taste to show herself. The Bousteads became large purchasers—the capitalist himself buying plate and pictures, the ladies lavishing their money upon all kinds of ornamental articles and nick-nacks.

But I will not dwell longer on this scene. Suffice it to say that in the course of the afternoon, the steward received from the mortgagees' solicitor the requisite funds to fulfil his engagements to the servants generally; and to each of the males did he give a written character—while the housekeeper did the same towards the female portion of the household. I received my money and my certificate as well as the rest; and the omnibus-van was got in readiness to convey to the town those who thought fit to avail themselves of this convenience. I knew not what course to pursue: I longed to ask my fellow-servants for some advice—but they were all so busy on their own account that I feared to trouble them. I felt as if I were again to be thrown friendless upon the wide world. I had however plenty of ready money in my possession, and an excellent testimonial of character: but these circumstances were not a sufficient consolation to dispel that sense of utter loneliness which I experienced. All the other servants had either relatives or friends ready to receive them, or plans ready formed for prompt adoption: whereas I had not a single human being to whom I could fly, and no settled purpose in view. It was however necessary to leave the Hall; but before I quitted my chamber, I sat down and wept

—for to me it was a home to which I was about to bid farewell!

Having put off my livery and resumed my plain clothes, I entered the omnibus which was filled with my fellow-servants. They were all so busy in conversing amongst themselves that but little attention was paid to me: not that this arose from any actual callousness or heartless indifference on their part; it was simply thoughtlessness—and I felt too unhappy to obtrude myself upon their attention. When we reached the town, there was a general leave-taking amongst us all: my fellow-servants hurried off in different directions—and I was left alone at the tavern where the vehicle had stopped. It drove away on its return to Charlton Hall; and as I watched its departure, methought its disappearance was the severance of the last link which had thus for one year bound me to "the Ravenshill family.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE TIVERTONS OF MYRTLE LODGE.

AS I have already said, it was a small tavern where I had thus been set down; and the landlord began overwhelming me with questions—as to all that was going on at the Hall, how the sale was progressing, whether there were many purchasers, and so forth. Having given him such answers as, in common civility, I thought fit—I requested him to tell me if he could possibly assist me in procuring another situation. He was a good-natured and well-meaning man; and frankly replied that he thought I should stand a much better chance of

procuring what I sought at Exeter, or at any other large place, than in that small town. Accordingly, on the following day, I repaired by the coach to the cathedral city: and was set down at a small inn to which the landlord had recommended me. I lost no time in making the usual inquiries amongst certain tradesmen in Exeter, and speedily heard of three or four places that were vacant. But the one which seemed, from the specified requirements, most suitable for my age and abilities, was a situation in the service of a family named Tiverton, who resided at a place called Myrtle Lodge, about three miles from the city. I was informed that Mr. Tiverton was a retired stockbroker from London, who by the sudden death of a distant relative some ten or a dozen years back, had inherited the Myrtle Estate, consisting of five hundred acres, in addition to a considerable sum of money in the Funds. These acquisitions, added to his own property, had enabled him to retire on about three thousand a-year; and he had married one of the numerous daughters of an impoverished Peer, who was only too glad to sink his aristocratic pride and bestow the portionless Lady Georgiana upon the fortunate stockbroker.

Possessed with this information I set off for Myrtle Lodge, proceeding thither on foot, as the distance was not very great, and the day was fine, with a refreshing breeze—for it was now the month of October. I had no difficulty in finding my way, as the Lodge was situated near the main road; and as I walked along, I thought of the varied and manifold incidents which had occurred during the fifteen months that had now elapsed since I had left the Nelsons' school at Leicester.

The reader may be assured that the image of Annabel was uppermost in my reflections; and it was with a swelling heart that I reviewed all the circumstances which had transpired relative to that beauteous creature. I wondered what had become of her mother—wondered also whether Mr. Lanovor ever thought of me—and whether he had instituted any proceedings for the purpose of discovering my whereabouts? Again, too, for the thousandth time, were my thoughts reflected back to that memorable night on which I had fled from his dwelling. I could not doubt—I never had doubted, that my life was threatened on that night: Annabel herself had told me so—she had assured me it was menaced by her own father—But for what reason? wherefore should he have sought to make me the victim of so diabolical a crime? And then, too, his mysterious connection with that man Taddy—I could not understand it! It was a mystery which ever became all the more and more bewildering, the oftener and the longer I thought of it.

It was in the midst of such reflections as these none of them being of pleasant or agreeable nature that I arrived within sight of a gloomy-looking red-brick house, standing on a slight eminence about a quarter of a mile from the main road, and approached by a carriage-drive traversing two or three fields and a paddock. From a peasant who was passing along, I learnt that this was Myrtle Lodge; and I must candidly confess that I was considerably disappointed by its appearance. The cheerful name which it bore had led me to picture to myself an equally cheerful mansion situated in the midst of smiling pleasure-grounds: whereas the scene that

I beheld was quite the reverse. The house was large, with an infinite number of very small windows; and viewed from that distance, it looked more like the remnant of an old barrack than a gentleman's country-seat. There were many immense trees grouped around: but these were so situated that they added to the gloomy aspect of the mansion, instead of rendering it cheerful with their rich autumn-tinted foliage.

Passing through an ordinary five-barred gate, at which there was no porter's lodge—only a little miserable-looking cottage close by, with a few dirty and half-naked children playing about in front, I was proceeding along the carriage-drive when I observed a lady walking slowly in the same direction. She was some fifty yards in front of me, and was followed at a short interval by a tall footman carrying an enormous French poodle under each arm. This footman was dressed in a dark livery, very shabby, and the gold lace of which was considerably tarnished. He wore an ill-powdered wig, much too small for his head; and there was something mournful, as well as rigid and severe, in this man's appearance. The lady—who was likewise very tall, and excessively thin—was dressed in an old lavender-coloured silk gown. A shawl, one of a showy pattern, but very much faded—a French bonnet that had once been pink, but had lost all its colour and had a rusty look—a parasol which seemed to have grown old and worn out as a shield alike against sun and rain—soiled kid gloves—and a black silk reticule, in which keys and half-pence jingled together, completed this lady's toilet. As for her personal appearance, I may as well add that she had a

pale face, with sharp angular features—light blue eyes, altogether lacking in lustre—and thin lips, which she retained very much compressed. Her age might be about forty: her look was severe and proud, at the same time prim and old maidish. Blended therewith, too, was a certain expression indicative of meanness, ill-nature, and narrow-mindedness. She was decidedly ugly and unprepossessing, without a single redeeming feature,—and likewise without a ray of any better feeling shining through that disagreeable and sinister aspect.

The lady was walking so very slow,—tho' footman with the poodles being, as a matter of course, compelled to follow at the same snail's pace,—that I could not possibly have lingered behind without having the appearance of impertinently watching them: besides I more than suspected that this must be Lady Georgina Tiverton herself. So I soon overtook them both: and on passing her by, touched my hat.

"What do you want, lad?" she said, speaking in a languid and yet a severe voice,—as if it were unpleasantly fatiguing for her nerves as well as painful to her pride to have to address an inferior at all. "I dare say you have come about the situation?"—and then she fixed her dull blue eyes upon me very suspiciously, as well as very disdainfully: as if she thought it was quite possible I might be lurking about the grounds for no good purpose—or else that I was scarcely worthy of attracting her notice.

I intimated that I had come to apply for the situation of page, which I understood to be vacant at Myrtle Lodge.

"Then you can follow, lad, at a respectful distance," said the

lady: "and another time you will perhaps learn better manners than to think of overtaking your superiors with a view to passing them by."

I again touched my hat and fell into the rear,—observing, as I did so, that the tall footman looked very glum and very miserable indeed, though still rigidly severe, as he lugged the great poodles under his arms. It was now a sort of little procession that was formed towards the Lodge,—the lady leading the way as prim as possible, scarcely ever looking to the right or to the left, and holding her old parasol straight before her nose: though for what reason she had it at all, I could not think; as there was very little sun, and the October breeze blew fresh. The footman followed with the dogs; and I brought up the rear. Presently I noticed that the footman let down one of the poodles, very gently indeed—then the other—and led them both by faded blue ribbons which were tied round their necks. He now seemed to walk more freely, and with a little more elasticity of his hitherto rigid limbs; while it likewise struck me that he glanced over his shoulder towards me with an expression of grim satisfaction, as if he felt that he was outwitting his mistress. He was a hard featured man, with a sallow complexion, and certainly did not seem as if he were fed on roast beef and drank strong beer: indeed he had a certain hungry look, and also as if he were labouring under a sad depression of spirits. One would have thought him an unhappy man, of lugubrious disposition—discontented and dissatisfied with all things in general, and his own place in particular.

Nevertheless, it seemed, as I have said, to afford him some

little relief that he had contrived to set down the poodles without being detected by his mistress; and he increased the interval between himself and her, so that she might not hear the pattering of the dogs feet. But, alas for the vanity of sublunary hopes!—the lady dropped her reticule, causing 'he keys and the half-pence to rattle together upon the road: and as I darted forward to pick up the rusty old silk bag, she stopped short. Turning slowly round, she beheld the high crime and misdemeanour of which the footman had been so stealthily and insidiously guilty; and drawing herself up into the most dignified primness, and with a look of awful sternness, she said, "John Robert!"

"Yes, my lady," answered the glum-looking footman, with a touch of his hat: and he stood like a veritable culprit before her.

"You have disobeyed my orders, John Robert," resumed her ladyship, "and you have done this in a manner which I will not designate so lightly as an ordinary act of carelessness or neglect: but you have done it under circumstances of cunning and duplicity which—"

"Really, my lady, I'm very sorry," mumbled the footman, getting more and more discomfited as the aspect of his mistress waxed more and more severe: "but them dogs, my lady, is so heavy—"

"Now don't answer me, John Robert," she interrupted with deprecating sternness, "You know I can put up with anything except being answered. I never *will* allow anybody in my service to answer me:"—and as she thus spoke, she bent her severe gaze upon me, as much as to say she thought I was an impudent-looking young scamp, who was very likely to commit myself in

the manner she was denouncing, and that she therefore let me know beforehand what I might expect if I took the place and ventured to be so unpardonably audacious.

The footman, heaving a profound sigh, picked up the poodles again; and her ladyship resumed her walk towards the Lodge with the same stately slowness as before. I again fell into the rear—and began thinking to myself that I had already seen quite enough of Myrtle Lodge from a distance, and of its mistress in the space of ten minutes, to put me out of all conceit of the situation I had come to inquire about. But then I recollect that the tradesman who gave me the recommendation had told me the Tivertons were rather peculiar people, though he thought I should be happy and comfortable when once I had fallen into their ways. Besides, I could not for decency's sake turn abruptly round and hurry off; so I followed the lady and footman towards the Lodge. The nearer I approached, the more gloomy was its aspect. I have already said the windows were numerous and very small: the dark heavy hangings seen through the panes, strengthened the impression that the interior must be of the most sombre appearance. There was a tall narrow portico, formed of two lanky pillars, supporting a peaked piece of masonry; and the ascent into the entrance-hall consisted only of two steps—so that there was nothing imposing in the first impression thus made by Myrtle Lodge upon the mind of a stranger. The hall itself was spacious, but dark and mournful: it had a huge oaken, staircase, with massive balustrades; and what might be termed the rail of these was at least eight inches in width. The doors

opening from this hall, were low and deep-set; and a profound silence appeared to reign throughout the building.

"John Robert," said her ladyship, stopping in the middle of this great hall, and turning slowly round to confront the solemn-looking footman; "I hope that if I on *this* occasion pardon your grievous delinquency, you will not provoke my wrath again. Don't answer me, John Robert; but go and see that those dear pets are properly fed. They must be tired to death after your cruelty in making them walk. Now, boy," she added, with a stately gesture of the right arm, and an accompanying wave of the old faded parasol, "follow me!"

Lady Georgina Tiverton led the way into a parlour: while the unfortunate footman heaved another profound sigh, and looked as rueful as if he were going to be hanged, while he toiled along with the fat dogs under his arms. The room in which I now found myself was, as I had expected, of the most sombre aspect,—the draperies dark and heavy, without richness of material or elegance of arrangement—the furniture old, cumbrous, and massive—the carpet faded everywhere; and darned in many places—the pictures with huge dingy, frames—nothing light nor cheerful to relieve the cold and gloomy appearance of the spacious apartment. At a work-table sat a short, thin, very plain-looking female, in a rusty black silk dress—a not over clean cap, with faded blue ribbons—and an old dingy-hued scarf, thrown over her shoulders. She wore mittens—and was knitting. She was about five years younger than Lady Georgiana; but had a similarly old maidish look. This, however, instead of being blend-

ed with aristocratic pride, was full of the most abject humility—as if she could not rightly say whether her soul was her own or not, were she questioned on the subject. The moment Lady Georgiana entered the room, this lady threw down her knitting—darted up from her seat—and deferentially expressing a hope that her ladyship had enjoyed her walk, helped to take off her bonnet and shawl.

“No, Miss Dakin, I have *not* enjoyed my walk,” was the sternly severe response, delivered as if Lady Georgiana was both surprised and indignant at the bare idea, that she *could* have taken any pleasure in a ramble which was so cruelly spoilt by the conduct of the footman, and likewise as if she thought that Miss Dakin ought to have known, by some magical intuition on her part, that the walk had been thus spoilt. “That deceitful man John Robert—”

“Well, my dear Lady Georgiana,” exclaimed Miss Dakin. “I always knew he was deceitful.”

“And yet it was only this morning at breakfast,” responded the lady, “you were praising him.”

“Ah! because your ladyship was pleased with him *then*,” was Miss Dakin’s immediate rejoinder. “But what has the good-for-nothing fellow been doing?”—and she looked quite concerned, as if fully prepared for some awful narrative of John Robert’s atrocity.”

“You know, Miss Dakin, that this man, who has such good wages and is treated so kindly, has positive orders to carry dear Flora under one arm and dear Rosa under the other?”

“I know how good your ladyship is to that man,” ejaculated Miss Dakin,—“as you are to all the servants who are happy enough to enter your household.”

I was rather encouraged by this remark; and I even began to think that John Robert’s conduct in respect to the dogs must have been very ungrateful towards so excellent a mistress. Her ladyship, having by this time given her bonnet and shawl—not forgetting the old parasol—to Miss Dakin, was reminded of my presence; and instead of continuing her doleful narrative of complaint in respect to John Robert, she sat herself down in a very formal and solemn manner to catechise me. Miss Dakin rang the bell: the summons was answered by a thin, prim-looking lady’s-maid, of “a certain age;”—so that I began to fancy all the persons at Myrtle Lodge must be of Pharaoh’s lean kind. To this dependent the bonnet, shawl, and parasol were consigned, with strict and emphatic injunctions on Miss Dakin’s part, to put them away carefully; and then she resumed her seat and her knitting at the work-table.

“Now, boy, I will make time to say a few words to you,” began Lady Georgiana. “What is your name? and how old are you?”

“Joseph Wilmot, please your ladyship—and I am a few months past sixteen.”

“The name is not bad,” said Lady Georgiana, addressing the observation to Miss Dakin.

“Not at all, your ladyship,” responded the latter: and as she thought the mistress of the mansion was pleased and satisfied, she ventured to smile.

“And yet it might be better: for Joseph, you know, can be abbreviated into Joe; and nothing can be so vulgar as Old Joe or Young Joe. Both are execrable!”

“Execrable indeed!” answered Miss Dakin, now suddenly looking serious, and even ominous—as if she thought the name must be a drawback to my eligibility:

for it was by this time tolerably apparent that it was a part of Miss Dakin's duty to echo all her ladyship's opinions, and to take her cue in everything from this supreme authority.

"Well, we will not make the name an objection," continued her ladyship: "the age suits."

"The age is most admirably adapted," said Miss Dakin.

"And yet his height might be a little less," remarked Lady Georgiana, thoughtfully.

"True! it might," observed Miss Dakin, slowly shaking her head, as if the objection struck her forcibly.

"But we will pass over the height. Now about the character. To whom do you refer me, Joseph Wilmot?" demanded the mistress of Myrtle Lodge,

"Please your ladyship, I have a written character with me——"

"A written character!" she said, drawing herself up with awful dignity. "Miss Dakin, did he say a written character?"

"I am very much afraid so," was the ominous answer, very gravely given: "but I hope that my ears deceived me."

"Don't hope, Miss Dakin. Hope implies uncertainty."

"To be sure! Did I say *hope*? I am sure I was very wrong to hope in any case."

"No—there are cases in which we may hope."

"Ah, true! I sit corrected. There *are* cases:"—and then Miss Dakin sighed as if she did indeed know full well that she was speaking the truth, and that one of the cases in which the entertainment of hope was legitimate enough, was that of obtaining a husband, and which was by no means a strange one in her experience, though as yet ungratified.

"You sighed, Miss Dakin?" said her ladyship, with a look of the severest rebuke.

"Did I?" exclaimed the toady or companion—for such indeed she was. "I am sure I was very wrong!"—and so she was, because she felt she had not the faintest shadow of a right either to be miserable or to be cheerful without the tacit consent of her partoness.

"But about this written character," resumed Lady Georgiana, turning to me. "It is totally impossible I can think of taking you upon such testimony."

I was not particularly grieved at this refusal: for by this time I thoroughly comprehended the value to be set upon the eulogy pronounced a few minutes back by Miss Dakin on her ladyship's treatment of her servants. I however determined to retreat with honour to myself, and show that I had not sought the situation in the first instance without deeming myself justified. I therefore said, "I beg your ladyship's pardon for the trouble I have given; but the written testimonial I hold is signed by the steward of Lord Ravenshill, and on his lordship's behalf."

"Ah! that alters the case very materially," exclaimed Lady Georgina, her prim rigid features now actually brightening up: and she smiled.

"Oh, very materially indeed!" echoed Miss Dakin, smiling also.

"Because, you see," continued her ladyship, addressing her companion, "that although poor dear Lord Ravenshill—whom I knew very well in London some years ago, before I *descended*"—and she emphasized the word—"to throw myself away on Mr. Tiverton——"

"Ah! It was a sacrifice on your ladyship's part!" interjected Miss Dakin, shaking her head mournfully.

"Well, as I was observing," continued her ladyship, "though

poor Lord Ravenshill has made so dreadful a smash of it,—yet of course a lad who has been in his service *may* have a written character. Personages moving in my sphere, Miss Dakin, can stamp with authority a document which would be valueless when coming from your vulgar middle-class folks. Joseph Wilmot, let me see this written character of yours."

I was sorry at the favourable turn which Lady Georgiana's opinion had thus suddenly taken on my behalf,—as I really did not wish to accept the situation: but I had not the moral courage at the moment to say that I would not; and I accordingly produced the certificate. Her ladyship read it with great attention, and handed it to Miss Dakin,—who imitated, though at a humble distance, the air and manner with which her patroness scanned its contents.

"It will do," said her ladyship.

"Yes—it will do," responded Miss Dakin.

"Joseph Wilmot," continued Lady Georgiana, "I have no objection to take you into my service."

"Please your ladyship," I began, being about to decline: "I—"

"Don't answer!" she interrupted me: "I can't bear a servant who is in the habit of answering. This, I dare say, will prove your only fault: but I see that it *is* a fault—and you must correct yourself. What wages had you at Lord Ravenshill's?"

"Twelve guineas a-year, please your ladyship."

"That's a great deal of money," she observed, aside to Miss Dakin.

"A very great deal," was the response of the latter.

"But yet, considering the character—"

"Yes—considering the character—"

"It is not too much," said Lady Georgiana.

"Not at all too much," immediately coincided the toady.

"Well then, Joseph Wilmot, we will say twelve guineas a year—and two suits of livery. The liveries, be it well understood, are to be your master's—or rather mine—for I and your master are the same thing—"

"Just the same," observed Miss Dakin, impressively directing the remark to me.

"The liveries, I say, to be mine when you leave. And now I must tell you that I have everything very regular and very orderly. You get up at five in the summer, and six in winter—Early rising is good for the health—"

"And enable the servants," interjected Miss Dakin suggestively, "to get on with their work."

"And you go to bed every night at ten o'clock—except when we have company. You will have to assist the footman in all things—"

"Particularly the poodles," observed Miss Dakin, again impressing the words upon me.

"But you will soon fall into the proper routine," continued her ladyship, "You will find me very particular—but I hope a good mistress."

"Too good I" mildly observed Miss Dakin, in an undertone.

"Well, I trust that I have a proper regard for the welfare of my servants," proceeded her ladyship. "When you are ill, the family doctor prescribes for you for nothing; and you get your own medicines made up at the chemist's. Besides, you need not be dull here: for though we are very quiet people indeed, yet I do not wish to curb the natural

spirit of youth and cheerfulness:—"which latter remark was very considerate on her part, inasmuch as she possessed neither. "And now, if you like to go to the servants' room, to get a glass of small beer and a little bit of bread and cheese after your walk, you are welcome."

"How good you are, dear Lady Georgiana!" said Miss Dakin, admiringly. "You are so thoughtful and so considerate on behalf of those poor creatures who are compelled to go out to service."

I could not help thinking that any servant's situation—even the most menial—was preferable to that of this miserable grovelling toady, whose entire employment was to think, look, move, and talk in undeviating accordance with the will and humour of her patroness. But I of course said nothing; and I have no doubt that Miss Dakin fancied I entertained a very different opinion of the dignity of her position.

"Now, Joseph Wilmot," added her ladyship, "you can retire; and to-night you must be here with your boxes by nine o'clock—and not an instant later."

I thought to myself that, after all, I had better accept this situation. It afforded me a home at once: I might go farther and fare worse: if I threw away this chance, I might be a long time ere finding another: if I remained out of service, my money would be slipping away:—and I naturally shuddered at the idea of falling into such poverty as that which had thrown me in the way of Mr. Taddy. So I bowed acquiescence to the mandate last issued; but not standing in need of the bounteous bequest of a glass of small beer and a mouthful of bread and cheese, I at once took my departure from Myrtle Lodge.

As I was proceeding along the

carriage-drive, I encountered a short, thin man,—very shabbily dressed—about fifty years of age—and with a sharp suspicious look. He had a mean appearance, and none of the prideful assumption which blended therewith—or rather glossed it over—on the part of her ladyship. At the very first glance I experienced a dislike for this individual; and I hoped that he would not prove to be Mr. Tiverton. I was however disappointed.

"Well, youngster," he said, beckoning me to stop. "Who are you?"—and he eyed me just as if he thought I was some lurking thief carrying on a silver spoon or some other booty on which I had laid my hands. "Been after the place—eh? Well, I thought so," he immediately added, as I replied in the affirmative. "When are you coming?"

"To-night, sir—at nine o'clock."

"Very well, then," he instantaneously responded, in a peremptory tone: "you will be here at half-past eight. So now understand me I am the master here—and my word is law."

With these words he looked very fierce, as if thinking it possible that I might venture to contradict him by stating my impression to be somewhat different, and that Lady Georgiana's word was the only law to be followed. But I merely expressed my obedience to the command he had just uttered, and smiling with a sort of grim satisfaction, he passed rapidly on his way to the Lodge. I had thus acquired the certainty that it was my new master whom I had thus spoken to: but I was left in a strange condition of bewilderment and doubt as to whether he or his wife would prove the supreme authority.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

ON arriving at the tavern where I had taken up my temporary quarters in Exeter, I inquired of the landlord for any means of conveyance by which my trunk might be borne to Myrtle Lodge. He answered that a carrier's van would pass that way at about five o'clock: and that there was no public vehicle proceeding along the same road at a later hour. I had been ordered to make my appearance at the Lodge at half-past eight; and I did not like to anticipate the time. Besides, I was desirous to ramble through Exeter, and see whatsoever might be worth beholding. I therefore resolved upon forwarding my trunk by the carrier's van, with directions that it should be left at that cottage which was at the entrance of the grounds, and which (as I subsequently discovered) was dignified by the name of the porters' lodge. Having made this arrangement, and paid the carrier his charge, I took some refreshment, and then walked out into the city.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon; and I felt that I must not over-fatigue myself, as I had already performed a journey on foot of six miles, and had three more to do in the evening in order to reach my new home. I therefore sauntered leisurely along; and inquiring my way to the cathedral, amused myself with the contemplation of this superb edifice until the dusk began to close in between five and six o'clock. I was retracing my way to the tavern, in order to take some tea and have an hour's rest previous to setting off for Myrtle Lodge,—when at the corner of a street I suddenly beheld an object which made me shrink

with mingled horror and dismay into the nearest shop. The object was none other than Mr. Lanover!

I felt such a sickening at the heart—such a glacial terror too, seizing upon me—that I literally staggered into that shop; and sank like one exhausted, or about to faint, upon a chair. A young person who stood behind the counter, thinking I was unwell, offered me a glass of water; and somewhat recalled to myself by being thus addressed in a kind and sympathizing voice, I glanced rapidly around. It happened to be a pastry cook's shop where I had thus taken refuge from the presence of that loathed and dreaded being; and I asked for a bottle of soda-water. This was promptly supplied; and the beverage refreshed me. But now I knew not how to act. I thought that I dared not venture forth with a chance of encountering the man whom I was compelled to regard as my mortal enemy;—and yet what excuse could I make for lingering in that shop? Summoning all my courage to my aid,—and reflecting that whatsoever evil intentions Mr. Lanover might have towards me, he could not dare perpetrate a crime in the open street, and in the midst of a populous neighbourhood,—I determined upon sallying forth. The instant I crossed the threshold, I glanced in the direction of the spot where I had seen Mr. Lanover standing: but what was my surprise, and how strong were the undefinable feelings which sprang up within me, when on that very same spot—instead of the hideous humpback—my eyes at once settled on the lovely countenance of Annabel?

I was not a dozen yards from her; and there she stood, alone—but with her eyes fixed upon the interior of another shop; and I

at once concluded that she was waiting for her father, who was no doubt inside. It was not yet completely dusk, and moreover, just at the very instant that I thus caught sight of her features, a light springing up in the shop-window, suddenly flung its glare upon that countenance of such angelic beauty. And she was dressed in that same modest and becoming manner which she adopted when I first knew her: she was even plainly dressed:—nothing meretricious—nothing showy nor gaudy in her garb,—nothing bold nor forward in her demeanour. On the contrary, there was a certain visible timidity in her look, as if annoyed and alarmed at even being left for a few minutes standing alone on the pavement. In short, with a single glance did I perceive that she was the same innocent looking, modest and bashful Annabel that I had first known and whom I had learnt to love so fondly—aye, with all the affection of my boyish heart! Oh, had she left that profligate Sir Malcolm Wavenham? had she returned, so far as a once fallen girl *can* return, into the path of rectitude? was she thus plainly and modestly apparelled in atonement, as it were, for the too gauzy garb she had worn at the theatre, and for the rich raiment in which she was clad when I beheld her dashing past on a proudly careering steed, near the village of Charlton? Alas, the thought struck me at the instant that she must be a consummate mistress of dissimulation and hypocrisy—mere girl though she were—if she could thus so easily resume that outward appearances of virginal innocence and modest ingenuousness which used to characterize her, and which now again she wore. But, oh! to speak to her for a moment—if only for a

moment—at any risk—at all hazards—Yes, even the very dread and horror in which I stood of her father, were over-ruled by this earnest longing at that instant.

“ All these thoughts swept through my mind in the space of a few swiftly fleeting seconds; and issuing forth from the shade of the confectioner’s doorway, I accosted her at the same moment making her a quick sign not to give vent to any ejaculation which might reach the ears of her father. She beheld me: she comprehended that sign. Indeed, without it she would have been upon her guard: for she flung a rapid, penetrating glance into the shop, near the threshold of which she was standing.

“ Annabel!” I murmured, as I clasped the hand which she at once extended towards me; and I knew not at the moment whether my sensations of joy or of pain chiefly predominated.

“ O, Joseph, I am so glad to meet you!”—and she stopped short, evidently overpowered by her emotions: for the tears were gushing down her cheeks.

“ Dearest Annabel,” I quickly answered—“ for dear you must ever be to me, no matter in what circumstances you may be placed —Oh! you know how I have wept and sorrowed on your behalf!”

“ And I also for you, Joseph!” she responded in the soft melting tones of her silvery voice: and heavens! how beautiful did she appear at that moment: for a rich carnation mantled upon her cheeks—and her lovely azure eyes swam with a bashful tenderness. “ But tell me—are you happy, Joseph?”—and then those eyes, so soft and melting, surveyed me quickly from head to foot, as if to judge of my circumstances by my appearance. “ You are

struggling successfully with the world—are you not, Joseph?" she immediately added, evidently satisfied by the survey: for I was well-dressed in a suit of plain clothes, which I had purchased only a few weeks previously, and in painful anticipation at the time of the breaking-up of the establishment at Charlton Hall.

"Yes—I am earning my bread," I answered,—"but in that same capacity in which you last saw me—I mean as a domestic servant—But you, Annabel—do tell me—have you altogether—Oh, I dare not complete the question! You know what I mean?"

Strange was the look with which for an instant she regarded me—a look which I could scarcely comprehend! But all in an instant it changed—yes, it changed into one of terror and dismay—as glancing towards the shop, she said with feverish excitement, "Fly, Joseph—for Heaven's sake, fly!"

I pressed her hand—and in a moment was speeding along the street. A diverging one was near: I plunged into it, without daring to look behind: for I comprehended but too well what she meant:—her father, Mr. Lanover, was issuing forth from the shop at the instant she thus in terrified anxiety urged me to flight! I ran on until within a dozen yards of the tavern: then I relaxed my pace, and looked back to see if I were pursued. But neither in the gathering gloom in the middle of the street—nor in the flood of light which the shop-fronts now threw upon the pavement on either side—could I discern the horrible form of the humpback.

I entered the tavern, and ordered some tea. While I sat drinking it, all my thoughts were centred in Annabel. Was there not some strange mystery sur-

rounding this young creature? was she not a singular and incomprehensible being? All within the space of some fourteen months, I had seen her under a variety of phases,—first the modest, innocent, artless girl, ministering with all the sanctity of filial affection to an invalid mother—then suddenly bursting, as it were, upon my presence in the meretricious garb and dazzling lustre of a stage—then galloping past me in a splendid riding-habit, with waving plumes in her hat, and in the company of a notorious profligate—now once more the modest and ingenuous girl, with innocence written upon her brow, whatsoever consciousness of guilt there might be in the secret depths of her soul. Oh! and could this be the same Annabel who quitted me so abruptly at the theatre, and who sent out a message to the effect that she knew me not?—was that the same Annabel with *this* one who but a few minutes back had greeted me with such unmistakable joy, amidst such overpowering emotions, and with a modest blush rising to her cheeks as she gave me the assurance that she had often and often thought of me and wept in so thinking? Was *this* the same Annabel? Yes, yes—it was! But how could I account for all those varied phases in which I had beheld her—unless it were by the belief that she must indeed be a thorough adept in the wiles of dissimulation, and that the artlessness of her looks was only equalled by the artfulness of her soul? Cruel, cruel thought—a thought which wrung tears from my eyes—a thought which I could not repel, and which nevertheless was too dreadful to be associated with a young girl whose age was only a few months past sixteen!

Such were the reflections which

swept through my mind after this singular, brief, and most unexpected meeting with Annabel. And though feeling myself compelled by the overwhelming weight of circumstances to think thus disparagingly of her, nevertheless my soul yearned towards her—my heart was hers—Yes, were the name of Annabel synonymous with pollution itself, it were impossible to help loving her! There may be poison in the cup of honey—but it will still have its sweetness: there may be venom in the goblet of sparkling wine—but it will still possess its fascinations: there may be death in the perfume of some beauteous flower—but it will not the less retain the brilliancy of its charms. Oh! are not the apples on the shore of the Dead Sea delightful to the eye, though they contain ashes at their core? is not the shade of the upas grateful to the way-worn traveller: but is there not death in its umbrageous canopy?

From such reflection as these my mind was gradually turned into another channel of meditation,—yet scarcely another but merely a current of the same stream. I thought of Mr. Lanover's presence in Exeter. What could it be for? Was he in search of me? No—I scarcely feared this: for if he had obtained a clue to my whereabouts, he could not have failed to trace me from Charlton Hall to the tavern where I was now seated. Had he not rather come into Devonshire for the purpose of reclaiming his daughter from the companionship of an unprincipled profligate?—and if this were the case, how could he be, after all, so bad a man as to have entertained a murderous design upon my life? But did he intend to remain in this neighbourhood? If so, I should not be safe—I must not dream

of entering upon the situation which I had accepted in the morning: I must fly, and place an interval of hundreds of miles between myself and the dreadful humpback! But my box was already at its destination; and I could not afford to lose all the little personal property I possessed in the world. Besides, I must take courage—I must exercise caution—I must keep a good lookout, and notice, when at Myrtle Lodge, whether my movements should be watched and my footsteps dogged. The more calmly I reasoned, the fainter grew my fear that Lanover intended to settle at Exeter, or to remain in the neighbourhood. If he had readily, come for the purpose of recovering and reclaiming his daughter—as I firmly believed—it was by no means likely he would tarry with her in the same district where dwelt the individual from whom he must have thus obtained her. Exeter was but about twenty-three miles from Sir Malcolm Wavenham's seat; and it would be sheer madness for Mr. Lanover to keep his daughter within so limited a range from that point.

The result of my deliberations was that I would proceed to Myrtle Lodge according to my original intention;—and having paid my bill at the tavern, I set out on the walk of three miles that lay before me. It was only half-past seven when I thus took my departure: I had an hour at my command—and this was ample for the performance of such a journey. It was a beautiful evening: the fresh breeze of the day was lulled into a perfect calm: the sky was cloudless, with the exception of a few thin fleecy vapours, like an assemblage of snow-flakes, floating at a great height. Emerging from the city, I soon entered upon the road: but as it gradually grew more

and more lonely, I could not prevent certain vague fears from stealing into my mind. Ah! and then I recollect those painful and wearying night-journeys which I had performed when escaping from Mr. Jukes at Leicester; and though my position was now, thank heaven! considerably ameliorated in one respect, yet in another it was frightfully altered. For *then* I had only the fear of being captured and dragged to a workhouse; whereas *now* I entertained the dread of being overtaken by a horrible monster who sought my life. Striving hard, however, to conquer my apprehensions, I pursued my way briskly; and again did all my thoughts centre themselves on the image of Annabel. Oh, that the interview had been longer! Oh, that it should have been confined to the insignificant space of a couple of minutes! Had I not so much to say to her—so much to learn from her lips—so many questions to ask her? Had her father discovered that it was through her generous self-sacrificing kindness I had escaped from his murderous aim?—was it his cruelty that had driven her forth to seek a livelihood upon the stage, and thus be led into those temptations to which she had succumbed, and from the trammels of which he appeared to have at last rescued her? And what had become of her mother? These, and countless other questions, should I have put to Annabel, if I had been permitted the leisure.

While thus giving way to my reflections, I reached a lonely little inn—or more correctly speaking, an alehouse—which stood by the roadside about two miles from Exeter, and consequently about a mile from Myrtle Lodge. A carriage, drawn by a splendid pair of horses, had

stopped in front of this little hostelry. The coachman sat upon the box, ready to drive on: a footman stood by the open door of the vehicle, evidently expecting some one to come forth from the alehouse and resume his seat within. The brilliant lamps of the carriage threw their lustre upon the two noble animals, and on the ground where they stood. I felt tired with the briskness of my walk: I knew that I had plenty of time to spare—and I sat down to rest for a few minutes on a bench in front of the alehouse. Scarcely had I placed myself there, when a gentleman issued forth,—exclaiming, methought in a half-t tipsy tone, “Yes, Master Boniface, your ale is capital. My throat was as parched as the devil with thirst when I halted to partake of it; and now it is quenched. Good night.”

“Good night, Sir Malcolm,” answered the landlord: and the gentleman hastened towards the carriage.

Ah, this was Sir Malcolm Wavenham! The first tones of his voice had smitten familiarly upon my ear, while his back was still turned towards me; and even before the landlord addressed him by name, I was startled with the conviction that it was he. All of a sudden a terrible suspicion flashed to my mind. The carriage was evidently on its way from Exeter: was it possible that it was bearing off Annabel from her father, back to the abode of the profligate Baronet? I know not why this fancy should have so abruptly seized upon me: but certain is it that it did;—and almost frenzied by the idea, I sprang towards the vehicle. Past Sir Malcolm Wavenham did I bound as if I were mad; and dashing up to the door which the footman held open, I looked

in. Yes—there was light sufficient for me to behold a countenance which made me ejaculate “Heavens!” is it possible you could have done this!”

At the same instant I was seized on the collar by the powerful arm of the footman, and whirled round with such force that I was dashed up against a horse-trough in front of the inn. The loud roysterer laugh of Sir Malcolm Wavenham rang in my ears; and by the time I recovered myself, the equipage was rushing away,—its lights glancing like twin comets along the road, until a bend thereof suddenly veiled them from the view.

“You got that nicely, young feller, for your impudence!” shouted the landlord, with a loud guffaw, from the threshold of his house. “Why, what the dooce could you mean by it? I never seed sich a mad freak in all my life. What the dooce did you want going to stare in at the lady?”

I hurried on, partly in the wild hope of overtaking the carriage—partly to escape from the coarse and brutal jesting of the landlord. I was soon out of breath: but I had run at least a couple of hundred yards ere I recollect the futile absurdity of thinking to catch up the vehicle. Then I sat down by the way-side, and burst into tears.

“O lost, lost Annabel!” I exclaimed: “what is now to become of thee? Art thou so wedded to that vile profligate—Wedded! I wish thou wast,” I cried, in bitter repetition of that word which I had at first used in another sense: and then again I wept abundantly.

For several minutes I was so overcome with grief that I forgot my own present circumstances—forgot that I was on my way to enter upon a new situation: but

at length I grew comparatively calm, and continued my route. During the rest of the walk, the image of Annabel absorbed all my reflections; and it was in a kind of mechanical manner that I stopped at the gate leading into the grounds attached to Myrtle Lodge. I knocked at the door of that miserable-looking hut which stood near the gate; and it was opened by a thin emaciated female, who seemed half-starved. A boorish-looking man, in the smock-frock and leather gaiters of a farm-labourer, was smoking his pipe by the side of the fire—if an ounce of fuel, with scarcely enough heat to boil as much water as an egg-saucerpan would contain, deserved to be so denominated. I asked if the carrier had left my trunk?—the woman replied in the affirmative; and the man said he had just come back from taking it up to the Lodge, adding a hint that he thought the task was worth something to drink. I accordingly gave him six-pence, which his wife immediately pounced upon,—vowing in a querulous voice that it should not go to the ale-house, but should be put into the money-box. Neither of them asked me in to sit down; and as I continued my way towards the Lodge, I could not help thinking that everybody I had as yet seen in connexion with my new place was thin and scraggy, and either had a hungry or a half-starved look. I was however too unhappy on Annabel’s account to ponder many moments upon these things: but continued my way, thinking of that fair being until I reached the house.

Passing round to the back of the premises, I rang the bell at the servants’ entrance; and it was answered by the glum-looking man-servant whom I had seen carrying the poodles, and whose

Christian names were John Robert. He gave a sort of grunt on beholding me; and as I took this to be his peculiar mode of bestowing a greeting, I addressed him very civilly in return. He however said not another word—but led the way into the servants' room, which was separated by a narrow passage from the kitchen. There I found those whom I had now to consider my fellow-domestics. These consisted of the cook, the lady's-maid, and a housemaid,—so that including John Robert and myself, the domestic establishment was limited to five persons—little enough, I thought, for so large a mansion! But I was completely taken by surprise,—and the reader himself may smile when I inform him,—that the cook and the housemaid were as lean and scraggy as John Robert and the lady's maid, both of whom I had previously seen. I never saw such a meagre skeleton of a cook in my life; and though all the victuals might pass through her hands, it appeared to me as if she could certainly have very little discretionary power as to the disposal of them. The servants were seated at supper when I entered; and the greeting I received consisted of a few cold brief words from each. On the table there was a piece of cheese, or rather the crust of one—a very small modicum of bread—some brown mugs—and a tin can of beer, which turned out to be particularly small indeed. This was in reality a frugal repast, and one to which the strictest anchorite might have sat down without the slightest apprehension of being seduced into intemperance either in eating or drinking.

The cook desired me to take a chair and have my supper. Fortunately the incident which occurred during my walk, in respect

to the Baronet's travelling-carriage, had taken away my appetite: otherwise the walk itself would perhaps have sharpened it beyond a relish for the sorry fare which stood before me, and which contrasted unpleasantly enough with the suppers of cold joints and meat pies to which I was wont to sit down at Charlton Hall. I was however thirsty: but having taken a mouthful of the beer, I found it so exceedingly sour that I requested permission to drink water.

Little conversation took place amongst the servants: and if they did not exhibit any cheerfulness or gaiety, they were equally deficient in curiosity,—the questions they put to me being very few in number. There seemed to be a generally pervasive mournfulness amongst them, as if they were all under the influence of a dull vague terror: they spoke in subdued voices—they appeared like persons who, being cowed and spirit-broken, entertained a common sense of degradation and oppression beneath the iron rule of a stern discipline. I myself was in wretched bad spirits on account of the incident during my walk thither; and the cold gloom of the scene in the midst of which I now found myself was but little calculated to raise me up from despondency. But it seemed so natural to my fellow-servants in my new place that I should be thus dull and melancholy, that not one of them thought of inquiring the reason.

Precisely at half-past nine the parlour bell rang—the servants all stood up—and a procession was formed, the lady's-maid leading the way, the cook following, the footman coming next, then the housemaid—and I was bidden to close the rear. I could not possibly make out what this

was for: no explanation was volunteered: perfect silence reigned amongst the servants: and the procession moved slowly along, just as if we were mourners at a funeral. We ascended the stairs—we entered the parlour with the regularity and order of a disciplined squad of soldiers: and in the same formal array we took seats at the extremity of the room where the door was situated.

I had noticed down-stairs in the servants' apartment, that there was no fire, although the October evening was cold—and that there was but a single miserable tallow candle that did not burn much better than a rushlight. I now observed that things were but little more cheerful in the parlour. There was no fire in the grate; and though two mould candles stood on the table, only one was lighted. Could all this be through the mean stinginess of the master and mistress of the house? was the question I asked myself; and I certainly could not account for it in any other way. The spacious parlour was wrapped in a sombre gloom; and in the midst of the semi-obscurity I observed Mr. Tiverton sitting on one side of the table—Lady Georgiana, starch, stiff, and prim, on the other—and Miss Dakin at the upper end, with a couple of books before her. I now therefore comprehended—wherefore the domestics had been thus solemnly marshalled: it was for family prayers.

Miss Dakin deferentially inquired in a low voice if she should begin: whereupon Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana both slightly inclined their heads in solemn assent: and the toady accordingly commenced reading the prayers in a voice which she endeavoured to render as intensely miserable as she possibly could.

I glanced along the array of my fellow-servants, and noticed that they all wore a similarly lugubrious aspect, John Robert especially looking awfully unhappy, and the cook pursing up her mouth as if she had a deep sense of self-mortification for no end of sins and wickednesses which she had committed. At the termination of the first prayer, I was literally startled by the cavern-like gloom and sepulchral depth of tone with which John Robert groaned forth "Amen!"—for I found that it was a portion of his duties to enact the clerk. The service lasted for precisely twenty minutes; at the expiration of which every one—master, mistress, the toady, and the servants—all buried their faces in their hands for three minutes more—an example which I of course imitated. The signal to desist from this dumb show was a low half-stifled sound, between a groan and a grunt, on the part of John Robert: then we all rose, and solemnly marched forth from the parlour, descending with the due regularity of a procession into the servants' room again. Two or three minutes afterwards the clock in the kitchen struck ten; and then, as if everything were managed with the precision of that same clock-work which was in motion at the time, each of the domestics took a candle, lighted it—and with a solemn "Good night" to each other, began moving up-stairs. The housemaid showed me to my chamber, where I found my trunk; and ere she closed the door, she said in a low voice, "You are only allowed five minutes to get to bed; and whether in bed or not, the light must be put out. That piece which you have got," she added, pointing to the little end of candle which was burning in the socket of the stick, "will have to last you a whole week."

She then closed the door; and I found myself alone in a small attic just under the tiles,—sordidly furnished, and not particularly clean. I by no means liked the aspect of my new place: but I was still too low-spirited to devote much thought to the little circumstances which had already created this dislike. Being much fatigued, I was in bed before the prescribed five minutes had elapsed—and the light was out. But scarcely had I extinguished it, when I heard footsteps passing slowly along the corridor whence the servants' attics opened: then suddenly there was a loud and authoritative knock at one of these doors—and Mr. Tiverton's voice exclaimed "John Robert, your light is not out—and the five minutes have passed by at least three-quarters of a minute by my watch."

The steps advanced again, stopping for a moment at every door, until they halted at mine,—whence however Mr. Tiverton departed, no doubt satisfied, by the simple process of peeping through the keyhole, that I was in strict accordance with the rules of the house. I soon fell asleep, notwithstanding my sorrowful reflections—for I was exhausted alike in mind and body; and I have no doubt I should have slept on until a late hour in the morning, had I not been suddenly startled by hearing a large bell clanging as if it were just over my head. I subsequently ascertained that it was on the house-top—but literally over my head; for it was perched upon the tilings just above my attic.

"Ten minutes to wash and dress!" spoke the deep lugubrious voice of John Robert, as he knocked at my door.

I sprang out of bed; and not having as yet I had my livery

given out, resumed my own plain clothes. But I found it somewhat difficult to perform my ablutions and toilet within so limited a space of time,—having been accustomed at Charlton Hall, as well as at Mr. Delmar's, to take as long an interval as I required. On descending to the servants' room down-stairs, I was told by John Robert that I was just three minutes over my time—that as I was under him, he was answerable to his master and mistress for my proceedings—and that I must be more regular in future. At eight o'clock punctually, we all marshalled ourselves again—ascended to the parlour—and heard prayers read by Miss Dakin: these lasted twenty minutes as on the previous evening, and John Robert again officiated as clerk. On descending to our own rigion again, breakfast was served up,—this consisted of very weak tea and bread and butter cut enormously thick. There was no sugar,—the cook informing me that only a certain quantity was allowed by Lady Georgiana—that it was given out every Monday morning—that it could not possibly be made to last beyond Thursday evening—and that consequently there were always three days every week during which the servants had to dispense with the article entirely. There was not so much as a bone of cold meat allowed even to the footman; and again I could not help contrasting all this direful meanness and studied sordidness with the well-spread breakfast-table in the servants' apartment at Charlton Hall. I felt sure that if it ever happened that Mr. Thomas Austin were in possession at Myrtle Lodge, he would be starved out—his clasp-knife would be rusted—and he would pine away with coerced temperance.

At about noon I was sent up into the parlour, where I found the tailor with his measure in his hand, and who had evidently come about the livery. Two suits which had been worn by the page who preceded me, were lying on a chair ; and Mr. Tiverton told me to take one suit up to my chamber and put it on. While turning over the garments, I found that both suits were so well worn that I really could not tell which was the every-day one and which was intended for Sunday : whereupon Mr. Tiverton himself, putting on a pair of spectacles, assisted me to discriminate between the two—and a very nice sense of discrimination he must have had to be enabled to do it. He gave me the every-day suit : and hastening up stairs, I proceeded to put it on—or, I should rather say, to work myself into it ; for it was very evident that my predecessor must have been at least half a foot shorter than myself, and of marvellous leanness, though I was at the time of sufficiently slender shape. In short—and it was “short”—the suit did not fit me at all ; and I was really ashamed to descend in those garments,—the cuffs of the jacket not reaching near down to the wrists, the trousers only so far as the middle of the calf of the leg. But I fancied that Mr. Tiverton was not exactly the gentleman to have his instructions in any way deviated from : so I accordingly went down-stairs, feeling however that the figure I cut was most ludicrous. In the hall I met John Robert ; and as he surveyed me with a sort of sombre glumness, he suffered a low grunting groaning sound to escape him,—but whether it were in admiration or in deprecation of my appearance, I could not exactly determine.

On entering the parlour, I

found Lady Georgiana and Miss Dakin both seated there, in company with Mr. Tiverton,—all three solemnly and gloomily silent, and apparently bent upon holding a council as to what was to be done with the liveries. The tailor—a short, dapper-looking, little man, with a very dirty face and very bowed legs—was standing at a respectful distance, fidgetting with his measure and looking ill at ease, as a person does when not asked to sit down, nor spoken to, and not knowing exactly what to do with himself or how to seem unconcerned. The moment I made my appearance, I saw that the countenances of Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana became considerably elongated ; while Miss Dakin,—who was quite prepared, as usual, to assume any look which might be a reflection of that of her patroness,—made her own face of a correspondingly hatchet-like longitude. As for the tailor, his looks brightened up considerably with a sort of grimy lustre : for he no doubt flattered himself that it would prove inevitably necessary to have a couple of new suits.

“Well, for my part,” said Lady Georgiana, after a long and ominous silence, “I don’t at all see that these clothes cannot be altered to fit Joseph Wilmot. What do you think, Miss Dakin ?”

“Oh, decidedly !” was the toady’s quick response. “They are only a *leetle* too small for him—a mere trifle.”

“Yes, Mr. Pumpkin,” resumed Lady Georgiana, thus addressing the tailor: “I think that you must take these suits and make them fit the lad. I observed to you yesterday,” she added, turning to Miss Dakin, “that Joseph Wilmot was a trifle too tall, and that it was a pity: for I had these liveries in my eye at the time.”

"To be sure!" rejoined the toady: "your ladyship is so very far-seeing."

While this colloquy was progressing, Mr. Pumpkin began to look very rueful and very much disappointed: but Mr. Tiverton's countenance gradually assumed a sternly resolute aspect; and then I saw him glance at his wife with an unmistakable malignity, as much as to imply that though she fancied she had settled the affair all in her own way, he would very soon teach her differently. Accordingly, rising up from his seat, he said, "No, Mr. Pumpkin—I won't go to the expense of having these old things done up."

"Old?" ejaculated Lady Georgiana, in horrified amazement.

"Old?" echoed Miss Dakin, in amazed horror.

"Well, worn out and shabby, then," exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Pumpkin, take the lad's measure at once; and let him have a couple of new suits as quick as you can. Send him up new hats likewise, with new bands."

"This extravagance, Mr. Tiverton, is intolerable!" said the lady, in a tone of the sternest rebuke. "What do *you* think, Miss Dakin?"

"Miss Dakin will please to hold her tongue on the subject," at once observed Mr. Tiverton.

"Oh, to be sure?" said the toady, with a sort of hysterical giggle, as she likewise tossed her head indignantly.

However, Mr. Tiverton was resolute. Mr. Pumpkin, infinitely rejoiced, took the measure; and I hastened upstairs again to resume my plain clothes until the livery should come home.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A VISITRESS.

THIS little incident gave me a considerable insight into the character of my new master, and showed me on what pleasant and agreeable terms he lived with his patrician wife. It was evidently a struggle between them who should be the supreme authority within those walls: but the husband failed not to seize upon any favourable opportunity of asserting his own dominant power. Though mean and stingy to a degree, he nevertheless suffered his pride to get the better of his sordidness in this matter of the liveries; and to the circumstance of his being anxious to carry out his own will in direct opposition to that of his spouse, was I indebted for my new garments and rescued from the necessity of wearing the old shabby ones. When the liveries came home, and I put on a new suit for the first time since I had entered my place, John Robert surveyed me with visible envy: and as he cast a most rueful look over his own threadbare and tarnished raiment, he gave vent to his afflicted feelings by means of his habitual half-groan, half-grunt.

Before I properly resume the thread of my narrative, I must place on record a few more particulars relative to this family. That the meanness of my master and mistress were excessive, has already been shown; and I speedily found that it extended to the minutest details. The number of servants being so limited, the amount of work allotted to each was most onerous; and yet we never could give satisfaction; there was always something to complain about. Lady Georgiana paid a visit to the larder every morning, and

appeared to measure with her eyes every article of food, so as to eke it out with the nicest exactitude. She had a partiality for thin and ugly female servants; because, as I understood, she considered that they made a household so much more respectable, insomuch as there was all the less chance of their laughing and giggling with individuals of the other sex. The whole routine of the establishment was regulated as it were by clock-work precision; and thus it was by no means difficult to comprehend how my unfortunate fellow-servants had been reduced to mere automatons—that they laboured under a continued depression of spirits—that they were afraid of talking too loud—while anything bordering on gaiety was totally out of the question. The only reason they retained their places and did not seek to “better themselves,” was because Lady Georgiana made it a rule never to give a character with a servant who left her household;—and what were these unfortunate beings to do if they cut themselves adrift upon the world without such an indispensable means of procuring other situations? Besides, times were bad—numbers of household servants were out of place—and it was therefore considered better to have a bad situation than none at all.

The Tivertons received very little company, and seldom gave parties. These were doubtless too expensive: for nothing could exceed their meanness and parsimony. The very candle-ends were counted: the tea and sugar were doled out in the smallest quantities: so much beer—and that of the vilest and sourest description—was allowed for a fortnight’s consumption in the servants’ room; and if it were drunk up beforehand, the remainder of

the period beheld water supplying its place. I have already hinted that Lady Georgiana and her husband did not live on the best possible terms together. She, in her aristocratic pride, looked down upon him as a vulgar member of the middle class; while he, on his side, no doubt calculated that he should have done much better to marry the wealthy daughter of a London citizen than the portionless scion of a patrician family. They had no children; and therefore to what end they strove and struggled to save and amass money was rather a puzzling question. In this aim, however, there was a wondrous agreement of opinion between them,—with the occasional and far-distant exceptions of such instances as that to which I was indebted for my new liveries. As for Miss Dakin, she was one of the most contemptible of women,—fawning and cringing to Lady Georgiana—always taking her part in her disputes with her husband—and yet somehow or another contriving to keep on tolerably good terms with Mr. Tiverton himself. She was one of those beings who sell their independence of spirit—sell all their faculties of hearing, seeing, and thinking—for the miserable stipend which a patroness is willing to give. It was even surprising that Lady Georgiana allowed herself such a luxury as a “companion:” but perhaps the mystery may be explained by the fact that she needed some one to flatter her—some one to bear the brunt of her ill-humours—some one to listen patiently to her tirades about the long ancestry from which she was descended—some one to assist in taking her part against her husband, and to corroborate her complaints that she was a very shamefully-used woman. Again, as Lady

Georgiana had no children—and as even the most ill-conditioned of her sex generally feel the necessity of loving something—she kept poodles on which to bestow her attachment; and these animals were the only living beings at Myrtle Lodge that were not stinted in their food and were cared for with some sort of tenderness.

I had been about a month in my new place, when one day—having occasion to enter the parlour for some purpose—I found Miss Dakin seated there alone, knitting a pair of mittens for her patroness. I could not help noticing that she looked at me in a very peculiar way, and methought with a certain degree of confusion, which only rendered her uglier than she naturally was.

"Joseph," she said, "I hope you are satisfied with your new place? You may depend upon it, you have a very good friend in me: and I do my best to save you from scoldings."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, miss," was my response; and I certainly marvelled that I should have thus won for myself the favour of this lady, as I had never taken any trouble to secure it.

"Oh! you needn't thank me, Joseph," she at once replied, blushing and simpering. Everybody that possesses a heart must like *you*. But dear me! how awkwardly you have tied your neck-cloth! I am sure that if Lady Georgiana saw it, she would scold you for being slovenly. Do let me arrange it properly for you."

"I think, miss, it will do very well as it is—"

"Oh, no! indeed it will not!"—and flinging down her work, Miss Dakin flew towards me; so that I was compelled to submit to this proof of her kindness. Her hands

trembled very much, and kept coming in contact with my face. She blushed and simpered more and more; and when she had done tying the cravat, she patted my cheek, saying, "You are a very handsome lad, Joseph; and I—"

My countenance became crimson; and flinging an indignant look upon Miss Dakin, I turned abruptly round and quitted the room. But that glance showed me that she had become all in a moment as white as a sheet: she was literally quivering too with rage. From that time forth Miss Dakin was a mortal enemy of mine.

Weeks passed on; and as Christmas approached, it was whispered in the servants' room that Lady Georgiana's youngest sister—or rather half-sister, for her father the Earl of Mandeville had married twice—was coming on a visit to Myrtle Lodge. Though a shrewd, money-loving, parsimonious man,—worshipping Mammon for Mammon's sake—Mr. Tiverton had a particular weakness: and this was that he felt proud of being allied to an aristocratic family, and therefore vain of parading any of his wife's relatives before his acquaintances. This will account for his having perhaps readily enough assented to the proposal of his spouse, that her sister Lady Calanthe Dandas should become an inmate of Myrtle Lodge for a few weeks. The meanest and most sordid, too, in a certain sphere of life, are apt to launch out somewhat at times, and on great occasions; and therefore the reader must not be surprised when I say that it was proposed to spend the Christmas season with some little gaiety at the Lodge. Preparations were made for the reception of Lady Calanthe: a new carpet and new draperies were actually and positive-

ly purchased for the chamber which she was to occupy; and invitations were issued for a dinner-party one day and a soiree for another, in the Christmas week. I was enlivened and cheered by these preliminary proceedings, which promised some relief to the monotony of the existence we all led at Myrtle Lodge. My fellow-servants seemed to imbibe the same feeling; and even John Robert was so animated with fresh life as to smile when a new suit of livery was ordered for him,—Mr. Pumpkin being engaged to supply it.

At length the day arrived on which Lady Calanthe Dundas was expected. The cook must have felt herself quite another being when she had a really good and copious repast to prepare for the dining-room, and was enabled, without any interference on the part of her mistress, to serve up a better dinner than usual in the domestics' apartment. Lady Calanthe had never before visited the Lodge; and therefore it was unknown what sort of a person she was—whether handsome or ugly—amiable or the reverse,—whether she resembled her sister, or afforded a pleasing contrast. Her very age was likewise a matter of doubt, although it was certain that she must be many years younger than Lady Georgiana. Not that my fellow-servants displayed any particular anxiety upon these points: for the conjectures to which I heard them give utterance were few, and expressed feebly and timidly. I myself however did experience some curiosity: because I felt assured that on the character and disposition of the expected visitress, would in a great measure depend the spirit and the duration of those gaieties which, heaven knows! were so much needed to dispel the soul-

deadening gloom in which I had now for nearly three months at Myrtle Lodge.

It was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon that a travelling carriage with post-horses dashed up to the front door of the house. John Robert and myself were promptly in attendance: Mr. Tiverton, Lady Georgiana, and Miss Dakin, likewise came forth to receive the visitress. Then from the carriage descended a handsome, well-dressed, smart-looking maid, whose age might be about five-and-twenty; and next a lady, muffled in furs, placed a hand on the abigail's shoulder and lightly tripped forth from the vehicle. The first glimpse that I obtained of her countenance by the light of the hall-lamp, showed me that it was exceedingly beautiful; while the figure, even though encumbered with its piles of winter clothing, was characterized by elegance and grace. With a gushing enthusiasm which at once gave me an insight into her heart, she flew towards her sister, whom she embraced affectionately: then in the most affable manner she gave her hand to Mr. Tiverton—and when introduced to Miss Dakin, shook hands with her also. Presently, when the dinner was served up and I was in attendance, I had a full opportunity to make further observations in respect to Lady Calanthe. Her age did not exceed eighteen; and, as before said, she was exceedingly beautiful. A cloud of the darkest, glossiest hair threw into bright and brilliant contrast the fair countenance which it enframed. She had a purely classic profile,—the straight nose joining the forehead with only the slightest indentation. The upper lip was short and curved; and whatsoever haughtiness of expression this

feature would have otherwise imparted, was almost entirely mitigated by the sweetness of the smile which sat upon that coral mouth and which irradiated the entire face. Her eyes were large and dark: she had naturally but little colour on the cheeks—this however was now heightened by the cold frosty air through which she had travelled, and by the gay excitement produced by change of scene. In figure she was tall and slender—but admirably formed: while the statuesque carriage of the head and bust—the beauty of this bust—and the fine slope of the shoulders, would have constituted an exquisite model for a sculptor or a painter. There appeared to be no affectation, no aristocratic nonsense about this young lady: affable in manners, frank in speech, ingenuous in looks—with a certain becoming modesty spread over all—she was being as yet unspoilt by the dissipations of London life,—in the same way too that her beauty was as yet undimmed and the bloom of her charms unfaded by the heated atmosphere of gilded saloon.

The lady's-maid, whose Christian name was Charlotte, has already been glanced at as a handsome smart-looking young woman. I may now add that she was of gay disposition—fond of laughing and talking—but without harm or mischief in her manner or disposition. She was exceedingly good-natured; and when she found what sort of persons she had to associate with at Myrtle Lodge, she seemed to set herself to work in good earnest to infuse a little more cheerfulness into them. I at once became a favourite with her, because I ventured to converse somewhat more openly and frankly than did my fellow servants. She jested with John Rohert on his

rueful looks, though these were now cheerfulness itself in comparison with what they were wont to be; and he condescended to smile at her remarks instead of being angry: for indeed it was scarcely possible for even the most churlish soul to feel offended with the good-natured chattering and bantering of Charlotte the lady's-maid.

"Well," she exclaimed before she had been an hour in the place, "you people seem excessively dull,—buried as you are, in this out-of-the-way rural nook: but there is no reason why you should not make the best of circumstances. What? only one candle! Fie! I cannot possibly sit in the dark. Come, cook—let us have another. Oh! your mistress does not allow two candles—eh? Well, we shall see about that. You can throw all the blame upon me; and Lady Calanthe will save me from a scolding. Now, let me have a nice cup of tea—very strong. Oh! that will not do at all! What? two spoonfuls of tea for half a dozen people! Here, let me put it in. One spoonful for each individual, and one for the pot—that make seven. Now, my dear creature," she continued, speaking to the house-maid, "don't think of cutting bread-and-butter like that: it would strain one's jaws to open them to such a width. Here, let me cut it—thin, with plenty of butter."

As she thus went rattling on in her good-humoured way,—and without the slightest affectation, or what may be termed giving herself "airs,"—she suited her actions to her words. She lighted another candle: she almost emptied the tea-caddy into the pot, thus consuming at least three days' supply for one meal: and she then began cutting the bread-and-butter according to her

own liking. I looked on with unconcealed delight at these daring innovations: my fellow-servants with a sort of blank consternation. It soon became evident that Miss Charlotte understood what sort of persons the Tivertons were, and how the domestics had become modelled, body and soul, to the influences of a rigid discipline and a stern parsimony. Nor less was it apparent that she resolved, to the utmost of her power, to put things upon a better footing.

"Now, don't look so sadly frightened," she went on to say, sweeping her laughing and roguish blue eyes around: "I tell you to throw all the blame upon me. Depend upon it, Lady Georgina will not have the face to proclaim her own meanness by quarelling with me, because I choose to make myself comfortable. Ah! I comprehend—I have nearly used all the tea? Well, we can easily buy another pound: I will treat you to it to-morrow—as I mean to go to Exeter and see all that is worth seeing. Really this room has a cold and miserable appearance: there is not an ounce of fuel in the grate. Come, my boy," she added, turning to me, "you look a little different from the rest, and seem as if you had a spirit in you. Just empty that scuttle upon the fire. But stay! throw a good large faggot on first."

Unhesitatingly did I fulfil these instructions; and in a few minutes there was such a roaring blaze in the grate as Myrtle Lodge seldom beheld; so that the very walls themselves must have felt comfortable at having the damp dispelled by the genial and indeed unusual warmth now thrown forth. My fellow-servants appeared to have made up their minds, with a sort of reckless desperation, to let Charlotte have

her own way, and to profit by the bold innovations which she was evidently determined to introduce. When once they had abandoned themselves to this mood, they all became considerably more cheerful than they had doubtless ever yet been since they first crossed the threshold of Myrtle Lodge. I began to wonder whether, when the prayer-bell rang, Miss Charlotte would join in the procession: but my speculations on this point were presently put an end to by the following circumstance.

I had occasion to go up to the drawing-room for something; and on leaving it again, was followed out by Miss Dakin. Ever since the little incident of the cravat-tying, she had been wont to seize every opportunity of darting malignant looks at me, and of pointing out to Lady Georgiana any little oversight on my part for the purpose of getting me scolded. I therefore entertained no very friendly feeling towards her,—though I may say without vanity that I was naturally too good-hearted to bear her any direct and positive rancour. I also despised her too much for the entertainment of so serious a feeling. When, however, she thus followed me out upon the landing, I hurried my pace towards the stairs,—whereupon she cried out sharply and petulantly. "Come here, sir! What are you running away like that for? You might have seen that I wished to speak to you."

I turned—but said not a word. She looked excessively spiteful and malignant, as if she could have flown at me and scratched my face with her nails.

"The next time, sir, that you see me following you from a room," she went on to observe, "with the evident intention of addressing you, you had better

take care and wait in respectful attention—or you will speedily get your impudence put down, I can tell you."

Still I said nothing : but I felt that my lips were curling with contempt—whereat she actually trembled with rage, her lips becoming white as ashes, and twitching with a spasmodic nervousness.

" It is Lady Georgiana's command," she said, the words literally hissing up from her throat with the concentrated fury of her ire,—" that the servants do not come up to prayers while Lady Calanthe is at the Lodge: but the service is to be read by John Robert in the domestics' room at the usual hour. Now, sir, will you go and give these orders? or shall I inform your master and her ladyship that you refuse?" and she eyed me with a wicked malignity, as if nothing would have pleased her better than that I should have returned some insolent answer and laid myself open to be evilly reported in the manner she had threatened.

" I was merely awaiting, miss," was my calm and collected response, " the orders which her ladyship has sent through you : and I do not think that you have any reason to infer that I should for a moment refuse to deliver them."

You are insolent enough for anything!" was her quick and spiteful retort : then, as if all the energy of her passions were suddenly concentrated in the feeling she was about to express, she said in low but bitterly emphatic accents, " I hate you!"

I could not help giving a sort of scornful laugh at this avowal of aversion which was thrown out : for my spirit was to a certain degree excited—and I did not choose this wretched toady to domineer over me. As I was

turning away—and indeed had already reached the stairs—she flew after me : she caught me by the arm—her fingers clasped my flesh as if with an iron vice ; and still in that same low but deep accentuated tone, she said, " Yes, I hate you—I abhor you! I could have liked you—I could have loved you madly—I would have done anything for you—But—but—I hate you—and I will wreak all the vengeance of a woman's bitterness upon you!"

I was certainly not frightened—but I was really astonished at this address. She immediately turned away ; and no doubt composing her looks with all the power of a consummate dissimulation, re-entered the drawing-room. I had a very great mind to mention the circumstance to my fellow-servants when I descended to rejoin them ; but I thought it better not. I did not like to render myself the hero of a scene ; and I felt by no means flattered on account of having at any time won the love of such a creature as Miss Dakin. As for her hatred, I certainly did not fear it: for I did my duty to the utmost of my power towards my master and mistress, and resolved to be even still more circumspect than hitherto in my conduct, so as to avoid furnishing the toady with an opportunity of venting her spite upon me. Besides, I reflected that if, after all, I should lose my present situation, I had the written testimonial of Lord Ravenshill's steward as a means of procuring another. For all these considerations I kept silent in respect to Miss Dakin,—confining myself to the mere delivery of the message with which I was charged.

" And pray," inquired Charlotte, who had listened to it with an arch smile, " how long do these prayers occupy?"

"About twenty minutes," responded John Robert.

"Then, if you please," quickly exclaimed Charlotte, in a positive manner, "we will dispense with them. I am not going to sit here, Mr. John, and listen to you droning away for twenty mortal minutes, in that voice of yours which sounds as if it came up from a grave. I always say my prayers in my own chamber; and can then pray as my heart dictates."

John Robert commenced some remonstrance: but Charlotte cut him short by a good-humoured jest. He was compelled to yield: and so we all sat talking round the blazing fire until bedtime.

On the following morning Charlotte informed us that she had obtained Lady Calanthe's permission to go to Exeter for a few hours: and, moreover, that as she was a total stranger there, and did not like to proceed alone, she had Lady Georgiana's authority (obtained through her sister) to be accompanied by any one of the domestics who could be best spared.

"Of course you can't go, cook—or else there would be no dinner. As for you," addressing herself to Lady Georgiana's maid, "you are sure to be wanted when your mistress puts on that precious old faded silk gown of hers presently. You," she continued, turning to the housemaid, "have got all the rooms to do, and only one pair of hands to do them with: So I am sure you have a full week's work all to be compressed into one short day. As for you, John Robert, the ruefulness of your countenance is enough to give one the blue-devils. So I shall make you, Joseph," she concluded, in her gay manner, "the companion of my trip. I am sure I could not have a nicer little *beau*; and I

shall treat you to a good lunch at the pastry-cook's. Come—be quick—put on your best livery—and let us be off."

I was by no means sorry to avail myself of this opportunity for a holiday, and gladly assented to the proposal. I lost no time in apparelling myself in my best clothes; and when I again descended to the servants' room, I found Charlotte already waiting for me. She was handsomely but neatly dressed—with no flaunting display, and everything in good taste.

"I sha'n't forget to bring the promised pound of tea," she said, laughing, to the other servants as we took our departure. "And now, Master Joseph," she continued, as we emerged from the premises, "how are we to get to Exeter?—for I understand it is three miles, and I do not profess to be a good walker. The day is, however, fine and frosty; and perhaps I might make the attempt."

"You will have to do so," was my answer: "for I know not of any conveyance passing along the road at this hour. There is one—the carrier's van—which leaves Exeter at about four o'clock: and by that we can return."

"Well, this is a consolation, at all events," she cried, good-humouredly: "and therefore I will resign myself to the walk into the city. By the bye, what do you think of my young mistress? is she not a beautiful creature? But I will tell you more—she is as good and amiable as she is beautiful."

"She appears so," I observed.

"Oh, yes!" added Charlotte enthusiastically, "you can read it upon her countenance. Heavens! what a difference between her and her sister—that prim, starch, insufferably proud Lady Geor-

giana! I never saw her before, you know: I was not in Lord Mandeville's service when Lady Georgiana married Mr. Tiverton. That, I believe, was seven or eight years ago, when Lady Calanthe was a mere child."

"And how long have you been in attendance upon your young mistress?"

"About three years. You know Lord Mandeville married a second wife, by whom he has three daughters, of whom Lady Calanthe is the eldest. He has half a dozen other daughters and two sons by his first wife: so you perceive there is a perfect swarm of them; and as his lordship, between you and me, is not very well off, the girls are all portionless."

"And are they all beautiful like Lady Calanthe?" I inquired.

"The three by the second marriage," responded Charlotte: "but the six by the first are absolute frights—though Lady Georgiana is decidedly the ugliest of the bunch. By the bye, that Miss Dakin is a very fitting companion—But why did you start so, Joseph?"

"Did I start? I am sure I was not aware of it—I did not mean it—"

"Well, I suppose it was nothing, then. Now, I am not very quick in taking aversions; but I certainly like that Miss Dakin as little as can be. Would you believe it?—as I was descending the stairs just now, after dressing myself to come out with you, I met Miss Dakin; and you should have seen how superciliously she tossed her head as she looked at me, and appeared inclined to give herself such airs, as if she felt herself a lady and that I was only a lady's-maid. Or I suppose it was because, with those shabby old things of hers, she was quite jealous to see a simple lady's maid having good clothes on her back. I was passing her, when she said, 'By

the bye, young woman, Lady Georgiana told you that you might take one of *our* servants with you':—and she laid such stress on the *our*, just for all the world as if she were the mistress, or it was all a partnership concern; and she went on to demand, 'Pray who is to accompany you?'—'Joseph Wilmot, miss,' I answered; and you should have then seen again how she tossed her head. I did not wait to let her give herself any more of her airs; but hurried down, thinking to find you in readiness. And you were not: but you kept me waiting full five minutes—which was very shameful of you."

Here Charlotte laughed in her good-humoured way, revealing a set of the finest teeth, which very advantageously counterbalanced a somewhat large mouth.

"What a dreadful place all you people appear to have of it!" she quickly resumed: for she was a terrible chatterbox. "I certainly expected to find something more cheerful. Lord Mandeville's seat, though out in the country, as one may call it—being at no great distance from Enfield—"

"Enfield!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, to be sure—a few miles from London. Everyone who knows London knows Enfield. Ah! by the bye, what a shocking occurrence took place in that neighbourhood about eighteen months ago—the murder, under most mysterious circumstances, of a gentleman named Delmar."

"I heard of it," was the observation I now made, but in a tremulous voice.

"Oh! everyone who reads newspapers," continued Charlotte, must have heard of it. It created an immense sensation."

"And has there never been the slightest clue to the discovery of the assassins?" I inquired: and I was half inclined to tell Char-

lotte how painfully intimate I was with all the circumstances of the tragedy, save and except in regard to the very point on which I had just put the question. But on second thoughts, I kept my own counsel: for I saw that my companion was somewhat giddy and unguarded in her speech, though without meaning any harm; and I feared lest on her return to Lord Mandeville's seat she might mention in that neighbourhood of how she had fallen in with me, and the intelligence might by some means or another reach the ears of my mortal enemy—the man who called himself my uncle—Mr. Lanover.

"No," she replied; "not the slightest clue has ever been discovered to the murderer or murderers. It has remained wrapped in a seemingly impenetrable mystery: but the deed was of course perpetrated by burglars, as some things were stolen."

"And who lives at the place now?" I asked, with difficulty concealing the emotions which this topic whereupon the discourse had turned, was but too well calculated to excite.

"At Delmar Manor? Oh! the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, to be sure. But I believe that Miss Delmar—Edith, I think her name is—at present resides there also."

"To whom does the Manor belong? But I suppose equally between those Mulgraves and Miss Delmar?"

"I really cannot say," replied Charlotte. "But you seem to know something about the matter. Were you in London at the time?"

"Yes—I was in London at the time. By the bye," I immediately added, for the purpose of avoiding farther questioning, "how long do you think you are going to remain her?"

"At the Lodge?" exclaimed

Charlotte. "I must confess I hope not long; but I fear for at least six weeks or a couple of months. It may seem a bad compliment to you that I should thus regret having to be cooped up in that dreary-looking place for such a time—particularly in this winter season: but you must candidly admit, Joseph, that your fellow-servants are not the most agreeable of companions."

"How can they be otherwise?" I asked. "I dare say that when they first set foot at the Lodge, they had their cheerful and gay moments as well as other people; but the strict discipline and the hard work are quite sufficient to crush the spirit out of anybody."

"So I should think indeed!" ejaculated Charlotte. "You are the only one who appears to have any spirit left. But you are young—I should suppose you are not seventeen yet?"

"Sixteen and a half," I observed.

"Well, getting on that way. However, at your age people put up with things better than when they are older. Youth is not so easily depressed. But if you remain another year or two in that place, you will become as ruefully owlish in your looks as that woful personage Mr. John Robert."

While thus conversing we had accomplished two-thirds of the distance to Exeter; and Charlotte now began expatiating on the appearance of the city as we drew near it. I gave her to understand that I myself was almost a perfect stranger there,—my experience of the place having been limited to a few hours.

"Never mind," she said: "we shall be enabled to find our way about—and if not, we must inquire it."

We entered the city; and our first visit was paid to the cathedral, where we spent upwards of an hour. We then proceeded

to a pastrycook's, where we took some refreshments,—for which I insisted upon paying ; and on this point had the utmost difficulty in overruling the generous scruples of my good-humoured companion. On issuing thence, we repaired to a grocer's, where Charlotte purchased a vast quantity of tea and loaf-sugar—directing the parcel to be sent to the office whence, as I informed her, the carrier's van started which was to convey us home.

"And now, Joseph," she said, "I have a few little purchases to make at a linendraper's ; and I shall not trouble you to come inside with me—but you must have the goodness to wait at the door, or lounge up and down the street; as it will not do for us to miss each other. I know that young men have no great affection for shopping."

We soon found an establishment the external appearance of which satisfied Charlotte, after a cursory survey of the goods displayed in the window;—and while she entered I remained outside, I had not been many minutes there when whom should I see approaching along the street but Charles Linton ? He immediately recognised me ; and hastening forward, shook me warmly by the hand.

"My dear young friend," he said, "I am so glad to meet you ! —so glad likewise to find you looking well! I have often thought of you ; and would have written a few lines if I had known where to address a letter."

I told him where I was living, and that I had been at Myrtle Lodge ever since the breaking up of Lord Ravenshill's establishment.

"Well, and now you will be anxious," he said, "to receive such intelligence as I have to

give you. I was really sorry to leave Charlton Hall in that stealthy, abrupt manner, without bidding good-bye to yourself or any of the servants ; but I really could not help it. Mr. Ravenshill insisted that I should keep his intention a profound secret. Besides, it was not until after you were all in bed that he came quietly to my room and told me that I was to get up very early and go away with him. So, even if I had not been enjoined to silence, I should have had no opportunity for leave-taking. Do you know—or can you guess who that young lady was? But doubtless you have heard that Mr. Ravenshill is married?"

"I guessed as much—but I had obtained no knowledge on the subject. Buried as I have been in the seclusion of Myrtle Lodge

—"

"Ah ! then I have some news for you," interrupted Charles. "That young lady who gave you the note was Miss Jenkinson."

"Miss Jenkinson?" I exclaimed. "Well, many and many a time have I thought to myself that it might have been she : but still, when I recollect all you had told me of how the marriage was broken off in London, on account of the duel and other matters—"

"Yes—but that was done by the old people: and now you have a proof of what true love can accomplish. Miss Jenkinson was devotedly attached to Mr. Walter; and though a sensible, intelligent, and prudent young lady, yet she was disposed to look over his faults in respect to the attempt at carrying off Miss Cuthbert and the jilting of Miss Boustead—if indeed the latter could be regarded as a fault at all. Besides, the circumstance of Mr. Ravenshill being wounded in a duel was sufficient to make a still deeper

impression on the heart of a young lady who loved him; and it appears that when he went off suddenly to the Continent, he wrote her a letter in a manly but affectionate strain,—frankly confessing that he had first courted her for the wealth which her father might be enabled to give her, but that he had soon learnt to love her for herself alone. He added that it was with his heart full of this feeling he now ventured to address her for the last time,—merely for the purpose of bidding her an eternal farewell, and, as an honourable man, of returning two or three letters which he had received from her. This epistle made a still deeper impression upon the young lady: and when, after the lapse of some few weeks, she read in the newspapers of the total ruin of the Ravenshill family, and how sales were about to take place of all the property, she resolved upon a particular course of action. I must tell you, Joseph, that under the will of an aunt, she was entitled to the sum of twenty thousand pounds, from which her parents could not debar her. Quitting her house in the most stealthy manner, she travelled into Devonshire. She wrote a note, addressed to Mr. Ravenshill, begging him to think not lightly of her for the course which she was adopting,—but confessing that she still reciprocated the attachment which he himself in his farewell letter had vowed to be eternal. She placed the peculiarity of the circumstances as an excuse for whatsoever unmaidenly or unseemly there might be in her conduct: she explained her precise position in a pecuniary sense,—adding that she knew her available fortune was only small, but that such as it was she placed it at his disposal; and she hinted at the

hope that her parents might ultimately be led to accord their forgiveness. It was this note, Joseph, which you bore for her to the hands of Mr. Ravenshill. I should add that it gave the address of an hotel at Exeter, where she awaited his response. You can imagine the rest. He fled at an early hour in the morning, not merely to avoid the hasty marriage to which, in sheer desperation, he had a second time been induced, by urgent letters received on the Continent from his father, to give his assent,—but likewise to accompany a fairer and more amiable bride to the altar. He left a note of his lordship to this effect: "On the very same day that I proceeded to Exeter, Mr. Ravenshill and Miss Jenkinson were married by special license."

"And her parents?" I asked.  
"Have they pardoned her?"

"Yes—at length," responded Charles. "The honeymoon passed in Cornwall; and there we have been residing until within the last few days. We are on our way to London, that and Mrs. Jenkinson may receive their daughter with open arms, and likewise welcome her husband. We have halted here for a few hours, as Mrs. Ravenshill is somewhat fatigued with travelling. I came out for a stroll—a walk, I am rejoiced to have fallen with you."

"And his lordship—her ladyship also?" I said, inquiringly.

"They are upon the Continent," answered Charles. "They went straight off thither, it appears on leaving Charlton Hall. One letter—and one letter only—Mr. Ravenshill received from them; and that, I should observe, was penned by his mother. His ladyship said that he had broken his father's heart; and as she persuaded there was no chancery

of Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson forcing their daughter, it was the 1<sup>st</sup> shocking match he could possibly have made. Her ladyship added that even if it should prove otherwise, and the old couple should relent, it was too late to rescue the property from the hands of others, or save the honour of the Ravenshill family. 'Thus, you may see that altogether her ladyship wrote in a very desponding way—while his lordship wrote not at all.'

"But was there not," I asked, 'some little bitterness as well as despondency in that letter? It would seem so, from all that you have told me."

Yes—you are right, Joseph: her ladyship, you know, is not endowed with the very best tempers. Perhaps you may be surprised that I am enabled to give you so many minute details with regard to all these particulars; but you will understand how it is, when I inform you that Mr. Walter—I suppose

we shall always call him Mr. Walter—now treats me quite as a confidential person."

"I am rejoiced to receive such good tidings of Mr. Walter's circumstances; and I congratulate you, Charles, upon having continued in a place which at last has proved so good a one."

At this moment Charlotte issued from the linendraper's shop; and I introduced Charles Linton. The latter had only half an hour to spare before he was compelled to return to the hotel where his master and mistress had stopped: but this half-hour he spent in walking with us,--giving Charlotte his arm and treating her with much attention. At length he took leave of us; and when he was gone, Charlotte declared to me that he was the nicest young man she had ever met in her life. We proceeded to the tavern whence the carrier's van started; and taking our places in the vehicle, got back to Myrtle Lodge at about five o'clock.

END OF PART I.

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